



ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XVIII. Published Every *Beadle & Adams, Publishers,* Ten Cents a Copy. No. 232
Week. 98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., April 4, 1883. \$5.00 a Year

ORSON OXX, THE MAN OF IRON; or, THE RIVER MYSTERY.

A TALE OF THE METROPOLIS.

BY ISAAC HAWKS, Ex-Detective.



ORSON OXX USED THE TOM TIT AS AN INSTRUMENT WITH WHICH TO PUNISH THE BLACK BRUTE.

Orson Oxx,

THE MAN OF IRON;

OR

THE RIVER MYSTERY.

A Tale of the Metropolis.

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CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING OCCURRENCE.

AMONG the many passengers who embarked on board the ferry-boat New Brunswick, one August night, at the foot of Courtlandt street, was a young man who was one of the most magnificent specimens of physical manhood it is possible to conceive.

He was over six feet tall, with massive shoulders, enormous chest, long limbs, whose knotted muscles were as hard as ivory, and a grace of movement which no lady could excel.

His round, full eye was as clear as crystal, his strength herculean; his activity panther-like, and his self-command perfect.

He had never smoked pipe or cigar, had never used tobacco and had never learned the taste of alcohol.

Gifted by nature with an exceptional amount of strength and activity, he had cultivated it to the highest point, so that, physically, he was as perfect a man as painter or sculptor could depict.

He was a trained athlete, who was absolute master of the art of self-defense. Could he have been induced to enter the prize ring no living professional could have "knocked him out" in four or forty rounds.

More likely the rule would be reversed.

This man, who is to bear a prominent part in the incidents which follow, was fashionably dressed in a low Derby hat, fine blue cheviot suit, which fitted his splendid figure perfectly.

A large diamond sparkled in his shirt-front like a point of fire.

He was Orson Oxx, the wonderful detective, sometimes known as the Man of Iron.

He was highly educated and belonged to an excellent family.

He had graduated from college, and, while casting about a brief while, before taking up the study of law, he became interested in a series of extraordinary crimes which baffled the skill of the most skillful detectives.

Orson Oxx dipped into the singularly fascinating problem with much the same interest that he explored the realms of science, when a student in college, and he unraveled the mystery from beginning to end.

Some months later he repeated the achievement in an equally difficult case.

These exploits established the fact that he possessed what may be called the true detective instinct, and he could have procured lucrative engagements at Scotland Yard or in the Metropolis.

On this mild summer evening, Orson Oxx was lounging at the bow of the boat, with a number of others, who were looking idly off over the water with no special object in view.

Orson Oxx was in a dreamy speculative mood—perhaps because of the coquettish look bestowed upon him by a young lady just as they were stepping on the boat. It was a beautiful face—almost an angel's face, he told himself—which had impressed him deeply.

He would never forget it—no, never!

She was dressed in mourning, and he wondered if she had lost a father, a brother, or—a husband? Not the latter, he thought; she must be too young to have been a wife.

It was a dark night without any moon.

Countless stars twinkled overhead, and the lights from the shipping, from the great city they were leaving behind, from that in front and from Hudson City beyond, where they rose tier upon tier, made one think of sailing among the constellations and stars.

Orson Oxx was on his way to Jersey City to call upon an old college acquaintance, who, he more than half suspected, was at Long Branch; but the ride across the North River was cool and refreshing, and he cared little whether he found him at home or not.

The New Brunswick moved out from the slip and had reached a point nearly half-way across, when a sudden commotion was heard at the stern, followed by the startling cry:

"A woman overboard!"

The multitude swarmed toward the spot, and the swaying boat for a minute or so seemed in danger of swamping.

But these craft are powerful and are made to carry a great many people.

"Who is she?"

"Did she fall over?"

"Fool! how can a person fall off a ferry-boat accidentally?"

"Then she jumped off?"

"Of course."

"Why did she do it?"

"Nobody knows."

"Who is she?"

A score of similar exclamations and questions were heard on every hand, and as usual there were no clear answers to any of the former.

Orson Oxx was among the first to push his way to the rear of the boat.

The captain had signaled the engineer to stop. The bell tinkled, the engine paused, the bell sounded again, and the immense wheels began plowing backward, churning the salt water into billows of foam.

The enormous craft slowed, came to a standstill, moved backward a short distance, and then the engine stopped again.

Every one who could reach the gunwales, was peering out upon the water in the gloom.

All were looking anxiously for a sight of the figure which had plunged over the stern.

"She walked rapidly out of the cabin, stepped on the guard, and before any one could guess what she meant, she leaped over."

Such was the truthful description of an occurrence, which, alas! is not very rare in this strange bustling world of ours.

"Who was she?"

"Was she alone?"

"Who was her father?"

"Who was her mother?"

"Had she a sister?"

"Had she a brother?"

"Or was there a dearer one?"

"Still, and a nearer one?"

"Yet, than all other?"

From the jangling, confused accounts of the dreadful occurrence, the truth gradually came out.

She was sitting beside an old gentleman in the ladies' cabin, and they were talking earnestly together; they seemed to be quarreling; all at once she sprang up and walked toward the stern; he followed, but not fast enough to overtake her; before he could prevent, she had leaped overboard.

This graphic account was given by an elderly lady to several listeners, among whom was Orson Oxx.

"Where is the old gentleman?"

The informant pointed to a man who stood with his handkerchief to his face, as if to hide his emotion. Orson Oxx recognized him as the companion of the girl dressed in mourning.

As the group looked at him he lowered the handkerchief for a moment and gazed out on the dark river, as if yearning for a glimpse of the one who was by his side only a few minutes before.

Beside the old gentleman stood a dapper young person, dressed fashionably and rather audaciously.

He had a note book in his left hand, and was busily writing with a lead-pencil in his right.

"What was the unfortunate lady's name, please?"

"Miss Eva Hildreth."

"Where from?"

"Philadelphia."

"Any relative of yours?"

"She is my niece, sir; she and her father visited me some months ago in England; while there, he, that is Caleb Hildreth—my name is Ward Hildreth—took sick and died. Eva was the only child, and the loss of her parent—her mother being dead—has nearly driven her wild."

"She was then a little off?"

"She was, most unquestionably; her deep religious feelings would never permit her to contemplate such a deed were it otherwise."

"What were the immediate circumstances attending this melancholy affair?"

"She had been acting strange all day; but she seemed to become more quiet toward evening. I was talking with her very quietly about our journey home, my object being to draw her mind off her grief, when, without a word of warning, she sprang up, and you know the rest."

The ubiquitous reporter seemed to have secured all the points he was in quest of, and moved off.

He had gone only a few steps, and was brushing past Orson Oxx, when the old gentleman who called himself Mr. Ward Hildreth caught hold of his arm.

"Are you a reporter?"

This was asked in a hurried, eager voice, not unnatural, perhaps, under the circumstances.

"Yes, sir."

"Then it'll be in the papers to-morrow?"

"Most certainly; it will make a good item."

"Of course; such a sad occurrence ought to be published, with all the particulars."

"Have no fears about that," said the representative of the Associated Press, as he lit a cigarette, and mingled with the crowd.

CHAPTER II.

A MYSTERY.

THERE was something about this whole business which struck Orson Oxx as singular.

He was a detective who, it may be said, always had his eyes and ears open, so that he was prepared for the development of crime at any moment, and under any circumstances.

It seemed to him that the old gentleman who had lost his niece did not act naturally. The

words he uttered to the newspaper man showed too great an anxiety to have the dreadful occurrence published to the world.

As a rule it is our wish to conceal such terrible misfortunes from the public eye.

Meanwhile every effort was made by the captain and crew of the New Brunswick to rescue the young lady who had leaped into the river.

The huge ferry-boat moved cautiously backward, her whistle blowing at intervals, while the deck-hands stood ready to assist the girl the moment she should be discovered.

But the most careful search failed to reveal the dark figure floating on the surface, and there was a general sigh on the part of the passengers.

"I think I'll take a look at that old gentleman by gaslight," muttered Orson Oxx, walking forward with those who had re-entered the cabin, where most of the passengers had gone, despite the warmth of the night.

He instantly made an astounding discovery.

The old man was talking in a low voice to two persons, and all three were standing close together.

The detective instantly recognized these men as a couple of the worst criminals in the country!

Their names were Hank Wagsnaff and Luff Swank. They had been engaged in burglary, highway robbery, and there was good reason to believe their hands had been stained more than once with blood.

The fact that Ward Hildreth was in close communion with two such wretches threw suspicion on him at once.

"More than likely this poor young lady was driven to suicide by that old scoundrel," was the conclusion of Orson Oxx, who began a maneuver with the purpose of getting closer to the precious trio.

The detective was not in disguise, and he therefore was backward about placing himself under the glare of the gaslight.

Withdrawing into the gloom, he watched them for a minute or two, during which the boat was moving toward the slip on the Jersey side.

Suddenly they walked forward and passed through the doors opening from the ladies' cabin.

Orson Oxx did not follow immediately in their footsteps, but he picked his way carefully among the teams and horses in the middle of the boat, until he reached the bow.

One quick glance in the dim light revealed the figures of the three persons seated close to the door in the darkest portion of the boat.

Confident they were men who had awakened his suspicion, Orson Oxx approached the rail quite close and leaned idly upon it, as though he were looking thoughtfully out upon the dark waters.

But never was his acute sense of hearing strained to a higher point than then when he heard the three speaking together.

And the detective, very properly was rewarded by overhearing several exceedingly significant expressions:

"It was infernally risky."

"She's the girl that's got the nerve."

"She's a splendid swimmer and could keep afloat an hour!"

"Tom Tit and Bilkens will be on hand."

"I'm afraid—"

Orson Oxx could not catch anything more. The speaker suddenly lowered his voice and the words were inaudible.

The others became silent and smoked their cigars.

But the listening detective had heard enough to set his brain to work. Nothing was clearer to his mind than that the suicide was a pretended one. The all-important words of these three men showed that they were conspirators in some atrocious plot, in which also the woman who had leaped overboard was a leading actress.

As to the nature of this plot, of course it was beyond the power of the detective with all his skill and finesse to make any conjecture, until he should receive more light.

"I will not call on Hinzeli to-night," muttered the officer, referring to his friend in Jersey City, "but will see what I can see elsewhere."

A few minutes later the New Brunswick bumped into the ferry slip.

As usual the bow struck sideways, the shock caused the passengers to stagger in the same direction and then, after a reversal of the engine, she swung against the heavy planking.

The men in blue shirts, with the name of the corporation owning them worked in white letters on their breasts, stood waiting; the big iron hooks were caught in the massive rings, the wheels rattled rapidly, the men tugged at the spokes, the immense steed yielded to the bit in its mouth, settled slowly to rest; the lattice-like gates closed together, as the plank was banged into place, and the passengers hastened up the walk, soon followed by the tugging horses and lumbering wagons.

Among the multitude, as a matter of course, were the old gentleman, Swank and Wagsnaff, who, instead of returning, on the same boat, stepped into the adjoining slip, where another

ferry-boat was to leave in the course of several minutes.

Orson Oxx learned, this without the loss of a second's time.

No sum of money would have induced him to miss the boat on which they intended to go back.

Although he had been a "shadow" only a short time, he had recognized before this, the necessity of carrying with him the means of making an almost instantaneous change in his personal appearance; and it had served him so well in many cases, that he was always prepared to adopt the artifice without delay.

After leaving the ferry-boat, he vanished from general view for several minutes—not more than three at the most, but when he reappeared, his own mother would not have owned him.

The handsome Derby hat had been remorselessly thrown away and was replaced by a brown soft felt whose brim was turned up all the way around. His hands were pushed deep down in his trousers pockets, like a countryman, visiting the metropolis for the first time. His coat and vest were the same, but the diamond, gold watch and chain were securely hidden about his person. Whereas his face was smoothly shaven before, he now wore a luxuriant mustache, rather scraggly at the ends and of a decided yellowish color. The clear penetrating eyes looked forth through a pair of spectacles mounted on silver.

To a skillful anatomist, it would have been impossible for Orson Oxx to conceal his magnificent figure and development, but an ordinary observer, in the night time, would not have suspected that he was such a matchless athlete.

The ferry-boat was in the act of leaving the slip and it required some active work on the part of Orson Oxx to reach it before the lattice-work gates were closed.

It took but a minute or two to discover that his three men were standing close together at the front of the boat and were doubtless exchanging confidences.

As there were other passengers around, it was easy for Orson to place himself at the elbow of the group, without awakening any suspicion, but the three seemed to have finished their consultations and they had not a great deal to say that the eavesdropper could catch. That little, however, was extremely important.

"I guess this is about the spot," muttered the old man, when they had reached a point near the middle of the stream.

"She did it well," said Swank, who was doubtless on the lookout for the leap at the time it was made.

"She's a daisy," was the characteristic comment of Wagsnaff, both of whom were so close to the man in disguise that in the faint light he distinctly recognized their faces.

The conspirators now ceased conversing and Swank turned his head and looked in the countenance of the handsome detective. He gazed intently for a full minute, as though he was studying his features.

The ordeal was a trying one to any person, but Orson Oxx bore it perfectly. He continued looking steadily in the direction of the metropolis, as though entirely oblivious of everything else.

He was convinced that Swank did not know him, and was indulging in the scrutiny without really suspecting his identity.

By and by the scoundrel turned back and said with alacrity:

"I wouldn't mind taking a bath myself to-night."

"Here's a good place—right in front of the wheel," suggested his pal with a laugh.

Then they were silent, all three smoking hard.

No doubt they had reached a full understanding and there was no cause for any further reference to the drama in which it was destined they should all be actors.

"I'll pipe them," was the conclusion of Orson Oxx.

CHAPTER III.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

WHEN the trio of conspirators stepped off the boat the Man of Iron was close behind them.

They spoke several times, but in the noise and confusion the detective could not catch a word.

When they crossed West street, to the surprise of the officer, the three separated without a word or the least halt.

Luff Swank turned to the left, Hank Wagsnaff to the right, while Ward Hildreth walked rapidly in the direction of Broadway.

"I'll take the old gentleman," was the conclusion of Oxx.

Several times Ward Hildreth glanced behind him while hurrying along.

"He is a sly fox," thought Orson; "he is afraid of being shadowed and he doesn't mean to be caught napping. I believe he is satisfied the coast is clear."

At the corner of Broadway, the other hailed an omnibus and entered.

"Why didn't he take the elevated railway?" Oxx asked himself and then answered, "I pre-

sume because he has some good reason for preferring this."

The detective showed a dangerous confidence in his disguise, by actually following the old man in the 'bus and taking a seat nearly opposite.

More than that, he took his dime and passed it up to the driver, with his own fare.

It was a perilous thing to do, but brazen effrontery and downright cheek often succeed, where merit fails.

Orson was convinced that the old man held no suspicion that he was piping him.

In order to carry out his plan successfully, it was all-important that the detective should divert suspicion from himself. If he should follow the other out of the stage, he would be likely to suspect him; so that risk was too great.

If Orson should keep his seat in the 'bus after the other had left, in all probability he would lose his game; therefore the only safe course was to depart first.

And yet, as will be seen, that would have been equally liable to prove a fatal error, for, if the vehicle continued several blocks Orson might lose sight of his man.

The true course was to go just before the elder passenger did, but, how to determine the precise moment was the question.

Orson began studying him attentively, and soon saw him turn and peer out of the 'bus window, in a way which showed he was looking for landmarks that would tell him how far he had gone up Broadway.

"He is close to the place where he means to leave," was the instant conclusion of the shadow.

"It's just the time for me to withdraw; I can keep the stage in sight for several blocks, without attracting undue attention to myself."

So the Man of Iron reached up and pulled the strap.

The old gentleman partly rose as if he meant to get out also, but glancing hurriedly through the windows at the side, he concluded to ride a little further.

Orson hoped he would follow, for, inasmuch as the detective had taken the initiative, he could not be suspected of shadowing the other; but the latter kept his seat.

"He isn't going far," was the correct conclusion of the detective, who hurried to the pavement, and immediately struck into a brisk walk.

Just one block ahead—at the corner of Pearl—(the detective having left at Duane,) the old fellow stepped out, walked to the side of the street, turned down Pearl, in the direction of the East River, at a lively pace, Orson not far behind him.

The singular contest continued until Chatham street was reached.

Down this the old chap swung along, until he had passed several cross streets and alleys.

Into one of the latter he turned, now walking slowly.

"There's where he is staying," muttered Orson, hanging back as far as was prudent.

He saw his game stop under a lamp-post, look around, and then continue his walk at a deliberate gait.

"He didn't see me; the old hawk is close to his perch."

In the gloom of the alley it was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution. Here and there figures were stealing along, but they were few in number.

In a few moments the old man stopped in front of a low frame house, of good exterior, and which stood a few feet back from the narrow walk.

He pulled a handle, and the jingle of the bell was plainly heard by Orson where he stood.

Immediately an upper blind was pushed open, and a lady looked out.

"Is that you, father?"

"Yes," was uttered in the same guarded voice.

"Mrs. Johnson will let you in."

As the lady at the window drew back her head, Orson caught a glimpse of the interior of the room.

That glimpse revealed two important facts. There were a couple of young ladies there.

Both were beautiful.

The one who drew aside the curtain and looked out was the identical young woman who leaped off the ferry-boat but a short time before.

CHAPTER IV.

A REMARKABLE EXPLOIT.

ORSON OXX had acted upon a well-grounded suspicion, with the result of proving that the lady who leaped from the ferry-boat New Brunswick was not drowned at all.

What stronger proof could there be than the sight of the woman herself alive and well?

It requires no ordinary courage to spring from a ferry-boat at night, in the middle of the North River; but that remarkable exploit was accomplished by the person of whom we are speaking, who was not only an expert swimmer, but a woman of daring courage.

Striking the water, she went scarcely below the surface, when she immediately reappeared

and began swimming with the assurance of Captain Webb or Boyton.

Indeed it was extraordinary that, incumbered as she was with her clothing, she should make such progress through the water.

The New Brunswick was moving so rapidly that, before it could come to a halt, she was beyond sight in the darkness.

"Where is Tom Tit?" she muttered, after swimming a hundred feet or more.

She ceased her efforts, and, supporting herself motionless, peered around her in the gloom.

"He promised to follow the ferry-boat closely and to be on the lookout—ah!"

At that moment she caught the sound of oars on her right.

Instantly she began swimming in that direction.

"Heigho! where are you?"

The exclamation and inquiry came from the boat and were uttered in a guarded undertone.

"Here! this way, blockhead!" called back the young woman.

A moment later a small boat came to view through the gloom and rapidly approached the swimmer.

It contained two persons, one only of whom was using the oars.

"Is that you, Tom Tit?" asked the woman.

"It is."

"Who is with you?"

"Bilkens, my pard."

The answer seemed to satisfy the young woman, who, with a skillful sweep of her arms, placed herself beside the boat which was nearing her.

The other occupant seemed to feel as though there was no special call for his services just then, and he continued to maintain a motionless position in the stern of the small craft.

He allowed his companion Tom Tit to lay down his oars and act the part of rescuer.

Tom Tit was a man of such small stature as really to be a dwarf, but he was very broad across the shoulders and had long arms of prodigious strength.

There was no better boatman around the harbor of New York.

Indeed it was necessary that he should be unusually skillful with the oars, for he was one of the most desperate river pirates that infest the waters about the metropolis.

His companion was another river pirate, fully as skillful, daring and more powerful than he.

He was a huge negro, who had been obliged to flee for his life from New Orleans, when but a mere boy. He was fully six feet high, active as a panther, strong as a horse and afraid to take no risk. He bore the characteristic name of Riseup Bilkens.

Tom Tit Tompkins reached down his hand and, catching hold of the small gloved palm of the lady, lifted her into the boat, as though she was an infant.

"Miss Hildreth, you look wet," remarked the dwarf, with a giggle as he gave her a seat.

"I don't feel very comfortable," she answered.

"There's your cloak."

He pointed to a bundle, which the negro handed her.

"Thank you," said the young woman to the African.

Hastily unrolling the garment, she flung it about her shoulders and said:

"This is an improvement; you were late."

"Not much."

"More than you ought to have been."

"We started out right behind the boat, but it went faster than I calculated on."

"I thought you were a good waterman."

"I'll give you my bloomin' eyes if you show me a better."

"Then you ought to have been quicker; however, never mind about that; it isn't worth discussing. I suppose you mean to rest on your oars until the ferry-boat comes back and picks me up."

The New Brunswick at this moment was standing still and the twinkling of its lights could be seen through the darkness.

Reminded of his duty, Tom Tit Tompkins dipped his oars and began rowing swiftly.

The boat was headed toward the New York side and spun through the water at a rate which seemed to surpass that made by one of the steam ferry-boats in crossing.

All this time, Riseup Bilkens was sitting in the stern, gloomily looking on and listening. He did not venture on any original observation of his own. He was not invited to favor the others with his views and until that was done, like most of his race, he knew enough to hold his peace.

It was a strange situation for a defenseless young lady.

She was on the Hudson, late at night, in a row-boat with two river pirates, both of whose hands had been stained with blood.

But if she felt any misgivings she did not show it.

These men were the servants of others.

They had been liberally paid to do their work.

Both the criminals knew that a big fee awaited them as soon as their strange task was finished.

They had had too many hard knocks with fortune to quarrel with their bread and butter.

Therefore they were obsequious and faithful to the young lady, who was completely in their power.

Tom Tit Tompkins rowed as though every second was worth a fortune.

Riseup Bilkens sat solemn and glum at the stern of the boat staring at the young lady.

He could see that she occasionally looked at him.

But though his face was turned toward her, she could not tell in what direction he was gazing.

His complexion was the favoring element which decided that matter.

"Let her gaze," he thought to himself. "If she learns any thing more than she knew afore I hopes she'll telegraph me."

Meanwhile Tom Tit was using his oars for all they were worth.

Feeling that he was master of the situation, so to speak, he headed for Barclay street.

In a few minutes he reached the pier, and, without difficulty, helped the lady ashore.

"Is everything ready?" she asked, as she placed her delicate foot on dry land.

"Yes."

"Where's the carriage?"

"It ain't fur off. Foller me."

The boat was left in charge of the African, while the two walked rapidly up the pier.

As Tom Tit promised, a carriage was in waiting, the driver of which looked as if he was expecting them.

The lady was helped in, the dwarf closed the door, said "Good-night," and the vehicle was driven rapidly off.

CHAPTER V.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

WE must pause at this point and briefly make known some facts necessary to a proper understanding of events which have already been told besides those which are to follow.

Ward and Caleb Hildreth were brothers, both being born in England.

Caleb Hildreth had a daughter named Eva, who, be it remembered, is the heroine of this story.

She was the affianced of Donald Marvin, a rising young lawyer.

Never were two hearts more perfectly fitted for each other.

Caleb Hildreth came to America when a young man, married, and was the father of two children, of which Eva only survived.

His wife died when Eva was a small child, and he never remarried.

He devoted his attention and energies to amassing wealth and to his beloved daughter.

He became immensely wealthy, being worth fully a million of dollars when he died.

He was an honest, high-minded gentleman, universally respected wherever known.

Ward Hildreth, his brother, two years younger, was his exact opposite in every respect.

He was a thorough villain and wretch from his youth.

He was without a spark of gratitude or love for those who had befriended him.

He pretended an affection for his brother Caleb, because it was his interest to profess such friendship.

On the part of Caleb, he felt a genuine love for the wayward youth, whom he sought to restrain by every means at his command.

It was the terrible "goings on" of Ward which caused the death of his mother, followed shortly by that of his father.

Ward was a gambler, blackleg, and everything that was disreputable.

Caleb sent regular remittances to his brother in London, who as regularly gambled the money away, occasionally winning enough to help him through his difficulties.

Two years before the opening of our story he suddenly appeared in Philadelphia with a young lady whom he introduced as his daughter.

That was the first that his brother heard of his marriage.

Ward explained that it was a runaway match which was kept a secret.

His wife had died some time before, leaving him their only child.

Caleb Hildreth and Eva made the father and supposed daughter doubly welcome.

They did their utmost to make their visit in America pleasant.

Ward and Cora remained a full year, during which the old gentleman formed the acquaintance of some of the worst villains who ever kept clear of the meshes of the law.

He was concerned with Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff in "showing the queer," in burglary, highway robbery, and even darker crime.

Then they discovered that among the detectives who were piping them was Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron.

Swank and Wagsnaff skipped the town without delay.

One went South, and the other West.

It was agreed that they should meet three months later in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Then, if the outlook was encouraging, the partnership would be renewed and continued.

Ward Hildreth, with Cora, left hurriedly for England.

We may as well state at this point that the woman who went under the name of Cora Hildreth, and who passed for his daughter, was no relation at all.

She was an English adventuress, whom he had picked up in Paris, and who was as hypocritical a wretch as he dared be.

If possible, she was more heartless and utterly devoid of principle.

At the same time, she could assume a garb of sanctity which would deceive the very elect.

The two had been in England less than a year when Mr. Caleb Hildreth and his lovely daughter, Eva, sailed for that country.

The kind-hearted brother purchased a comfortable home for Ward and Cora, furnished it, and then sat down for a pleasant visit.

A few days later, Caleb was taken sick and died, as we have already told the reader.

We hasten to say that his death was in no wise due to anything done by his brother or alleged niece.

What they might have done in that direction, under temptation, can only be conjectured.

But for the credit of human nature, they were spared the temptation.

Before the good brother died, he made known to the wicked one the fact that his will had been drawn by a legal gentleman in Philadelphia, Mr. Gaffney G. Galnaith.

His whole vast estate was willed to his daughter, and in case she died before marriage, it was all to go to his brother Ward, who was named the executor.

It will thus be seen that the only thing which stood between Mr. Ward Hildreth and vast wealth, was the life of Eva Hildreth, his niece.

So long as she lived, not a penny of it belonged by legal right to the surviving brother.

Really Ward Hildreth and Cora were in no danger of suffering, for Eva was charitable and affectionate.

She knew of the liberal gifts made by her father to his only brother.

It would have been her pleasure to continue and add to them.

Her father had never told her of the misdoings of his brother, and she never suspected his blackness of heart.

As for Cora, her supposed cousin, she was the personification of all that was good in the eyes of the unsuspecting Eva.

When it became manifest that only the single life interposed between Ward and Cora and an enormous fortune, the adventuress proposed that Eva should be put out of the way at once and forever.

She did not hesitate to volunteer to do the terrible deed.

Subtle poison should perform the work.

But the old man could not be brought to give his consent.

Not because he was too scrupulous and conscientious.

He was afraid of the consequences.

"It won't do," he said with a decisive shake of the head, "there is too much danger. Recent trials have shown that many lawyers are as good toxicologists as the professional experts."

"But we would not be suspected."

"Unfortunately we *would* be suspected at once. The legal gentlemen would be quick to find the motive, which is one of the first things sought in such cases, and the post mortem would complete the rope which would hang us both. No, my dear," said the old wretch, pinching her cheek, "we can find just as effective a plan, without a fraction of the risk."

"What is this wonderful scheme of yours?"

"That you should take the place of Eva in going to that undiscovered country from whose bourn, etc."

"Are you crazy?" asked the amazed adventuress.

"Here in New York, they have doubtless run men off to the lunatic asylum who are fully as sane as I am, and I am sure I am still all right in the upper story."

The scheme was completed and Cora entered heartily into it.

As soon as possible after landing in the metropolis, Ward Hildreth put himself in communication with Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff.

The plot was quickly perfected in all its details and put in execution.

The thieves did not forget to make known to the old man the unwelcome fact that Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron was in New York at that very time.

Therefore the greatest caution was necessary. Swank arranged for the important part taken by the river pirates, Tom Tit Tompkins and Riseup Bilkens.

Swank and Wagsnaff knew the precise time when the daring exploit of Cora Hildreth was to be attempted, and they made sure of walking upon the same ferry-boat with Hildreth and the young woman.

As it was necessary that due publicity should be given to the pretended suicide of Eva Hil-

dreth, one of the requisites was that it should become known to the public press.

Ward Hildreth agreed to go to the newspaper offices with the account and to offer a reward for the recovery of the body.

Fortunately he was saved this necessity by the appearance of a news-gatherer at his elbow, immediately after the frightful leap of the woman from the New Brunswick.

We have already made known to the reader the startling occurrence which took place on the ferry-boat, together with the cleverness and success.

He discovered the fact that a most skillful and daring plot had been carried out by which it was made to appear that Eva Hildreth the heiress had committed suicide.

The way now seemed open for Ward Hildreth to establish his legal claim to the immense personal and real estate left by his deceased brother.

But man proposes and God disposes.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO YOUNG LADIES.

ON the night of the startling occurrence on the ferry-boat New Brunswick, a young lady of enchanting presence was seated in the upper front room of Widow Mag Johnson's residence in New York city.

The apartment was tastefully furnished, and it was manifest to the most superficial observer that the widow was in anything but straitened circumstances.

The name of the young lady was Eva Hildreth.

She was no more than eighteen years of age, and was wonderfully attractive and beautiful.

In many respects she bore a strong resemblance to Cora Hildreth, the pretended suicide.

She was amiable as she was beautiful and accomplished.

She was attired in deep mourning, for the most tender attachment had existed between her and her parent.

She had been almost heart-broken, and it was weeks before she was able to undertake the return voyage across the stormy Atlantic.

How this voyage to Europe came to be made by herself and parent has already been told the reader.

But there was a touching tie which made her long to set foot on her native land.

She was the betrothed of Donald Marvin, a young and promising lawyer of Philadelphia.

They had parted like true lovers and the correspondence between them was of the sweetest and most ardent nature.

On her safe arrival in London, she had sent him a message by cable.

Although the loving barrister could hardly afford it, he telegraphed a warm message in return.

Then he resolved to make up for his lavish extravagance by the most rigid economy.

Donald Marvin was a most worthy young man, fully deserving of the heart of the beautiful heiress, whom he truly loved for herself alone.

But it is with Eva Hildreth that we have to do just now.

"Ever since dear father's death," she murmured, as she sat by the gas-light, with an open letter lying in her lap, "matters seem to have gone wrong."

She brushed a tear aside and heaved a gentle sigh.

"We left Liverpool so unexpectedly that I had no time to telegraph Donald to meet me. Perhaps it was well I did not send a message for him to come to New York. Although he is proud, yet I know he is very poor and he has his widowed mother to cherish and support. How I wish he would accept something like a money gift from me!"

Again the fair Eva sighed.

"But I gave uncle Ward a message to him which he sent at once. Uncle is very kind, but I did feel hurt just a little when Donald sent his dispatch to him instead of me, saying he was very sorry, but he had a case in court which he could not leave for several days."

"If he had directed the message to me, I would have been willing to excuse him."

"But I shall see him soon."

She took up the letter last received from him and again read over the warm expressions of his undying affection.

The maiden's heart fluttered as she realized that the whole wealth of this noble man's love was entirely hers.

"Ah, if father could have been spared to see Donald and me united! Dear father appreciated his noble nature—"

Just then the door-bell tinkled and a minute later Cora Hildreth came tripping up-stairs.

As she burst into the room, she threw off her cloak and showed that her clothing was saturated with water.

Her cousin gave a faint scream and threw up her hands.

"Mercy, Cora! what does this mean?"

Cora laughed apparently with great merriment.

"Don't be alarmed; I will slip into my room

and change my clothing, for I haven't a dry thread on me, and then will tell you all about the most ridiculous adventure you ever heard of."

She whisked out of the front apartment, which the young ladies used during the day, and in a remarkably brief space, was back again.

"My dear Eva," said she in her gushing style, as she dropped lightly into a chair opposite; "I fell into the river."

"But how?"

"I started across the Fulton street ferry with father, this evening from Brooklyn, where you know we had been to make a call, when by some mischance, which no one can understand, I slipped off the boat, just as it reached this side."

"Mercy! what a narrow escape!"

"I suppose it must have been, since every one pronounces it such, but I never thought of it until I was helped out."

"How long were you in the water?"

"Only a few minutes."

"How did you manage to keep afloat?"

"Don't you know I can swim?"

"I never had an occasion to learn that fact."

"Thanks to father's good sense I learned to swim when I was a small girl."

"I am glad to say that I also know how."

"It was an easy matter, therefore, for me to keep afloat for a few minutes, until a rope was thrown me. Then I was pulled safely out. But think what a fire I cut!"

"That is a small matter."

"I was dreadfully mortified; a gentleman took his wife's cloak from her shoulders and threw it over me, and, as soon as possible, father called a carriage and sent me home."

"Where is your father?"

"He will be here shortly; he had to meet a gentleman on important business."

"I am surprised that he did not come with you."

"He offered to do so, but there was no necessity, and I knew he had a most particular engagement."

"Well," said the gentle Eva, "you have great cause to be thankful."

"So I have and if I know my own heart I am."

"You might have drowned or been struck by the wheels of the ferry-boat."

"All that was possible, but I did not, so let us think no more about it."

"But are you not likely to suffer from exposure?"

"Fortunately the weather is warm, the water was cool, and, if I hadn't taken my bath in such a shockingly sudden way, I really would have enjoyed it."

"To-morrow we go to Philadelphia," said Eva, after a moment's silence; "home can never be home, when I know the loved form is gone from it forever."

"It must be sad on that account, and sometimes I wonder, dear cousin, how you can bear to enter the old family mansion, from which a father, mother and loved brother have gone out never to return."

"It is unspeakably sad, but life's burden must be borne. Were it not for the love of Donald I would pray that I might be taken away to join those who have gone before."

The cousins conversed in this affectionate manner for half an hour or more longer, when uncle Ward, as he was called, appeared on the scene.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ATROCIOUS PLOT.

WARD HILDRETH, the old man, whom our readers have heard of before, was warmly welcomed by his daughter and niece.

They conversed affectionately and pleasantly, but both the young ladies saw that some trouble pressed upon him.

His gayety was plainly assumed, when he referred to the pretended accident to his daughter.

At last Cora compelled him to tell his trouble.

"It is a very serious matter indeed," he said; "I feel it is my duty to tell you all, and yet I shrink from it."

"Why should you hesitate, dear uncle, when you know we would share all your trouble? If it is anything which money can help, you have only to let me know."

"Alas, there are some ills which money cannot heal."

"But there are few which it cannot help."

"Is this one of them?" asked Cora.

"I fear it is."

"Pray speak, dear uncle."

He hesitated a moment; then, with a deep sigh, said:

"I may as well out with it; I am likely to be arrested on the charge of manslaughter, if not a still more serious crime."

Eva clasped her hands with a gasp and Cora almost swooned.

"Tell us! tell us! it may not be so bad."

"You know, my child, that you could not explain how it was you came to fall off the ferry-boat into the slip."

"I cannot understand it now."

"I do."

"How was it?"

"You were purposely shoved overboard."

"Impossible!"

"The fact nevertheless."

"How did you learn it?"

"Accidentally, or rather providentially; do you not remember that some one lurched against you?"

"I recall something of the kind, but I supposed that was caused by the motion of the boat."

"Not at all; you remember a young scamp who stared so impudently at you that I warned him to stop or I would pull his nose for his impertinence?"

"Yes, but surely he would not commit such a crime for so slight an offense as that?"

"I would not have believed it, until a gentleman whom I know very well, assured me he saw him make the dastardly movement that sent you overboard."

"Can it be possible?"

"While my friend was talking, the scoundrel walked by us, and I heard him chuckling over his crime. I was so infuriated that I struck him a terrible blow. He went down on the pavement, and I fear was mortally injured."

"Oh, father," wailed Cora, "how dreadful!"

"But it cannot be helped now," said the unconscionable falsifier; "he is likely to die, and you see what a situation it places me in."

"Will not the law consider you had sufficient justification?" asked Eva, so shocked that she could scarcely speak.

"It might, had I struck him at the time he committed the deed, and Cora's life was in danger; but that was all over. Besides it may be impossible to prove that it was an intentional act on his part."

"How will they know it was you, father?"

"My friend was the only one who knew me, and he promised to say nothing about the sad occurrence."

"Then how will they find it out?"

"Others saw the affray, and the description will enable the police to track me; I managed to get away during the excitement; but depend upon it, they will be after me."

"What can be done?"

"Tell me what I can do," asked Eva.

The old gentleman was silent a minute or two.

"I did a good deal of thinking on my way here, and I have a plan; but it will put you both to a great deal of inconvenience, if not discomfort."

"Tell us what it is, father."

"You can name nothing we will not gladly do for you, dear uncle."

"We must leave the city."

"But we intend to do so," said Eva; "we are to start for Philadelphia to-morrow."

"I will be assuredly traced to that city; it will be as bad as if I remain in New York."

"What is it then?"

"We must go in hiding for a time."

"Where is there a better place for hiding than in this great city?"

The question was asked by Cora, and it might have puzzled many a person to reply.

But the old gentleman was prepared.

He sadly shook his head.

"We will start for Philadelphia early to-morrow morning, that is on the first train."

"But will not go there?"

"Not for the world."

"Where?"

"I have a place in mind; I will take you to it, and we will stay several weeks until the excitement blows over. What do you say?"

The question was addressed to both, and they were equally prompt in making answer.

"We will go to the ends of the earth for you, father."

"Give yourself no concern on that point; but tell me, uncle, why is it necessary that we should go in hiding?"

Fortunately for Ward Hildreth, he was prepared for this very natural inquiry.

"At first it would seem unnecessary, but I am well known as the father of Cora and the uncle of Eva. The police will hunt for you both, and, should they find you, the consequences will be most unpleasant to say the least."

"The matter is settled," remarked Eva; "but why not go at once?"

"There is no need of such desperate haste; any time before to-morrow noon will answer; you will need this evening to make your preparations; get ready, and I will go down-stairs and fix the matter with Mrs. Johnson."

The interview with the widow was a long and important one. She was given to understand that it had become necessary to make a hurried departure for Philadelphia, and she was put under a pledge to answer no inquiries that might be made concerning them.

She was at liberty to say that her guests had seen fit to go to the Quaker city, but she was not to mention their right names nor tell anything further.

She received a handsome fee in addition to her liberal charges for entertaining the three for several days.

When Mr. Hildreth came up-stairs again the

night was far along, and his daughter and niece had completed their preparations.

He suggested that they retire, and Eva Hildreth obeyed.

Cora remained a long time with her reputed parent.

They talked earnestly in low tones, making certain that nothing reached the ears of the girl in the adjoining room, who was tossing in a feverish sleep.

Alas! poor Eva Hildreth!

Not a shadow of a suspicion entered her pure mind of the dark plot that had been formed by these evil spirits days before, and in which the first successful step had already been taken.

Had she but known, she would have fled from that house as from a plague!

Slowly and surely the webs of the spider were being woven about that fair girl by those whom she believed to be her friends, but who, in truth, were her most cruel enemies.

CHAPTER VIII.

A THUNDERBOLT.

WHAT a record of happiness and misery, vice and virtue, joy and sorrow, life and death, is each issue of a daily journal!

Thousands who glance over the printed page each morning read there the doom of their hopes in this world or their exaltation to the high—pinnacle of expectancy.

Among the former class, on a certain summer day, was Donald Marvin, of the City of Brotherly Love.

He had wondered why so many hours had passed without receiving a letter from his betrothed, Eva Hildreth, but rightly decided that she had sailed earlier than was originally intended.

"Poor girl," murmured the young lawyer and devoted lover, "she has met with the great affliction of her life."

"She was most devotedly attached to her father, whose whole pride and delight was in his splendid daughter."

"Never was there a more beautiful sight than the devotion, trust and confidence of these two in each other."

"I wonder not that Eva's heart was almost broken when she was compelled to see him close his eyes in death."

"How I will cherish and love her when she is mine! She shall find in me father, brother, husband, protector—My God!"

At that instant the heart of Donald Marvin stood still.

He had been busy mechanically unfolding a copy of a morning paper, when his eye rested on a paragraph.

It was an Associated Press telegram from New York.

It was headed, "A Sad Suicide."

And it read thus:

"Last evening, between nine and ten o'clock, as the ferry-boat New Brunswick was making her way across the Courtlandt street ferry to the Jersey City slip, Miss Eva Hildreth, of Philadelphia, who was sitting beside her uncle, in the ladies' cabin, suddenly sprang up, and running quickly to the stern, leaped overboard. The startling action was so unexpected and swift that no one was able to interfere. Her uncle, Mr. Ward Hildreth, who was accompanying her to Philadelphia, did his utmost to prevent her committing the rash deed, but failed. Miss Hildreth was a beautiful and accomplished young lady, who was suffering so profoundly from the recent death of her parent that her mind was unsettled. Every effort possible was made to rescue her, but she instantly disappeared in the darkness, and the body at the present writing has not been recovered."

Such was the dispatch which froze the blood of Donald Marvin with horror.

And well might it do so.

Eva Hildreth was his affianced bride.

He had been counting the days and hours that must elapse before he could clasp her in his arms, and holding her there, kiss eyes and cheeks and mouth again and again.

"My God!" he wailed, after sitting motionless several minutes. "I never dreamed of this!"

The paper had dropped from his lap on the floor, where it lay for several minutes.

He was sitting in his own modest apartments, in Walnut street.

He stooped over, and picked up the paper again.

He stared at the appalling dispatch, until the words were burned into his brain as if with a white-hot iron:

"Dead! dead! dead!"

The words fell from his lips as if he were pronouncing his own doom.

Once more the journal slid from his lap to the floor, and he looked across toward his book-case. But he saw nothing. His thoughts were beyond that room. He saw the fairest and sweetest of women, as she stood on the deck of the outgoing steamer.

Again he watched the fluttering handkerchief waved by the delicate gloved hand, and the enchanting countenance.

He saw that lovely face until it faded out from view, and the mighty steamer vanished from sight on the great Atlantic.

She had sailed for Europe with her father, to be gone several months.

The time that must elapse before she returned was comparatively brief.

But it seemed a wofully long period to the impatient lover.

"Ay, she shall come to my arms once more—the Old World shall not keep her."

This was the thought that encouraged and buoyed up the youth.

Each morning he reflected that there was one day less for him to wait.

And now it had all come upon him with the suddenness of the lightning stroke.

He was not prepared for it.

He was dazed and horror-smitten for the time by the awful blow which had descended like the Alpine avalanche.

"I never can recover!" he moaned; "if I had but been given a warning—"

"So you have heard of it, Donald?"

Young Marvin turned toward his visitor, and recognized him as Mr. Ward Hildreth, the uncle of his betrothed.

"I am very sorry for you," said the old gentleman, in a feeling tone, affectionately placing his hand on his shoulder. "It is a dreadful occurrence, but try and bear it—like—"

At this juncture the tremulous voice gave way, and the handkerchief went to the eyes of the old gentleman.

He shook with his tempest of grief.

That is, he seemed to do so.

The reader has doubtless suspected there was anything but real grief about the old scoundrel just then.

For several minutes neither spoke.

Each was too much moved to give expression to his emotions.

Donald Marvin had met Mr. Ward Hildreth once or twice, and never fancied him, though he really knew nothing against his character; but all such feeling had departed now that both stood in the shadow of a great grief.

By and by they were able to master their emotions, and the old gentleman took his seat beside the young lawyer and lover.

"Tell me all about it," said Donald.

The old gentleman did so.

That is, he gave his highly-colored version of it, to which young Marvin listened breathlessly. It was impossible for him to doubt the truth of a single word related by his caller.

"I shall return to New York at once," he added, swallowing a great lump in his throat and sopping his red eyes again with his moist handkerchief.

"The body has not been recovered?"

"No; but every effort will be put forth. We can scarcely fail to find it shortly; though the tide was setting out to sea when—when—the accident took place. Poor Eva! she was smitten by her grief over the death of her father and my brother."

"It must have been a dreadful blow."

"You can scarcely imagine how great."

"His death was sudden?"

"Very."

"And unexpected?"

"Not entirely. I employed a most eminent practitioner, who told my brother and myself two days before the death that a latent disease had manifested itself. My brother was all broke up and could not last much longer."

"I am unnerved entirely by the awful fate of Eva."

"So am I; and you will excuse me."

The old gentleman rose to his feet.

Donald Marvin did the same and took his hand.

"Thank you for this call."

"Not at all. I think my dear niece would have died had she not been sustained by her love for you. It was that which kept her up. There—there—good day, sir."

He wrung the hand of the young lawyer, and desperately trying to force back his grief, hastened out of the office.

But there was anything but woe stirring the heart of the hoary old rascal.

He chuckled until he had walked a couple of blocks, when he drew his note-book from his pocket.

Placing his eye-glasses on his nose, he carefully studied a memorandum.

"Gaffney G. Galnaith, counselor at law, — Walnut street. He's my man, and I must see him at once."

The old conspirator hurried away.

CHAPTER IX.

A COUNSELOR AT LAW.

GAFFNEY G. GALNAITH was a lawyer past three score.

He was miserly, treacherous, and sly as a fox.

Caleb Hildreth, whose affection for his wayward brother led him to place so much confidence in him, was completely deceived by the old hawk.

In this he was scarcely censurable, for Galnaith had done little but deceive people for the past forty years.

He had met with great success, too. He had

wormed himself into the confidence of the trusting millionaire, who employed him to draw his last will and testament.

Gaffney G. Galnaith was a crusty old bachelor, slovenly in his dress, slouchy in manner, with a dilapidated office.

He wore huge silver-bowed spectacles, and an exceedingly soiled dressing-gown.

He had an enormous hooked nose, a vast mouth, and only three snags which answered for his teeth.

He was round-shouldered, with a rasping voice.

A great portion of the snuff, which he was so fond of taking, was lost upon his shirt-front, vest, and dressing gown.

The long feet, that were thrust into his slippers, were only partly covered by his dirty woolen stockings.

There were large holes in the heels, somewhat hidden by the legs of the hose, which invariably hung down over them.

Although it was a mild day in summer, a small wood-fire was burning in the grate, when Ward Hildreth entered this uninviting office on Walnut street.

Gaffney G. Galnaith's jaws seemed to be eternally working, as though his snags were chewing some invisible gum.

He knew better than to be gruff to a visitor before that visitor explained his business, so he looked up and returned the greeting of Mr. Ward Hildreth.

The latter measured his man, and saw the necessity of establishing a friendly understanding at once.

"Good-afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon," returned the counselor, waving him to a seat in one of the two vacant, rickety chairs.

"This is Mr. Galnaith, I believe."

"At your service, sir."

"Thank you; I wish to speak to you on business."

"I am ready to hear anything you have to say."

"Are we alone?"

Mr. Galnaith sprang up with surprising agility in one of his years and locked the single door in the room—the one through which the caller had just entered.

"We are entirely alone, sir."

"Thank you; my name is Ward Hildreth."

"Ah!"

"I am the only surviving brother of Caleb Hildreth, who died two months ago in England."

"Indeed, I regretted very much to learn of his decease; he was one of my most valued friends; a most noble man, sir."

"You speak truly; he was a client of yours?"

"He has been for many years."

"You drew his will?"

"I did."

"Is it in your possession?"

"It is."

"Where?"

"Safely locked up there."

He pointed to a huge old-fashioned iron safe.

"I would like to see it."

The old fox hesitated a moment.

"I believe you are not the legatee."

"I am executor."

"You speak truly; your brother no doubt told you that much."

"He did."

"His only child, Eva, is the sole legatee."

"She was, and in case of her death the property goes to me."

"You are quite correct."

"Well, she is dead."

"Is it possible? When did that occur?"

"Only yesterday."

Thereupon the visitor told the story which has already been repeated to the reader.

The old lawyer listened attentively.

When it was concluded he rose without a word and walked to his safe.

He drew the ponderous door backward, and fished from a drawer a folded paper.

It was the last will and testament of Caleb Hildreth, properly drawn, witnessed and sealed.

Opening it, he slowly read the important document.

Its main provisions have been made known.

Ward Hildreth was made the executor; and in case he survived the daughter, was the sole legatee.

If he died Gaffney G. Galnaith was named as executor.

Truly if love is blind, so is friendship.

It was passing strange that Caleb Hildreth should have placed such unbounded faith in his brother, when no one could have known his shortcomings better than did he.

Yet such was the fact.

The provisions of the will were found to be precisely as Caleb had stated to his brother before his death.

"Mr. Galnaith," said the villain, "my deceased brother spoke in the highest terms of your ability and integrity."

"I always strive to merit the confidence my clients place in me," answered the old fox, almost succeeding in blushing.

"It shall be my pleasure to employ you in

settling up the estate, and I shall see that you are well paid."

Mr. Galnaith grinned enormously.

So much indeed, that he displayed his three snags, and threatened the destruction of his ears.

"I wish to learn from you the necessary steps that must be taken to place me in possession of this property."

"They are simple," said the counselor, sitting back in his chair and trying to smile once more.

"Let's have them."

"I take it for granted that you wish to do everything strictly legal."

"Most certainly."

"The proper course will be for you first to go before the Register of Wills in the Orphan's Court, who on demand will issue a citation for me to produce the will in court, that it may be proven."

"Will there be any difficulty or delay about that?"

"Not in the least; fortunately the two witnesses, I being one, are within immediate reach."

"Well, what next?"

"On the day appointed, I will present myself with my witnesses. At the same time we must present the proofs of the death of the daughter."

"I will procure those in New York."

"Precisely, and I will give you assistance."

"What next?"

"Then the Register will issue letters testamentary to you as executor, and as such you will take possession of all personal property. The executor has nothing to do with the real estate, but that will go to you as legatee, under the provisions of the will."

"I understand."

"You notice by the will that you have been left a large amount of personal property, which is in the vaults of the Fidelity Safe Deposit Company. You have only to present your letters testamentary under the seal of the court to procure all that."

"What about the real estate?"

"There is considerable; if you wish it, it can be sold subject to whatever debts there may be against the estate."

"I believe there are absolutely none."

"I have no doubt you are right."

"How long a time will it take to wind up the entire business?"

"That is hard to answer; it might be done in a month."

"I will give you five thousand dollars if you complete the matter within a fortnight."

"That will be hard work, but it may not be impossible."

The miserly lawyer's eyes sparked with awakened avarice, and he began to suspect that everything was not "straight."

But he cared nothing, so long as the grist came to his mill.

Here was a chance to make a handsome fee, and he was determined to do it, if it were within the range of possibility.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPIDER'S WEB.

AMONG the many hearts crushed by sorrow there was no one more sorely smitten than that of Donald Marvin, the affianced lover of Eva Hildreth.

The last letter received from her spoke of an early departure for home, but it did not fix the date nor give the name of the steamer.

While he was looking for some message from her, she had arrived in the Gallia.

More than that, she had been several days in New York when he was dumfounded by the announcement of her death.

"And they haven't found the body," mused the sorrowing man, pacing the floor of his small office.

"That uncle is a hypocrite; he pumped up a tear or two, but he is so delighted over the prospect of securing such an amount of wealth that he could hardly keep from chuckling. He told me he had offered a reward for the recovery of the body and everything is being done by the authorities. I don't believe it. What does he care whether that sweet form drifting with the tide out to sea is ever recovered or not? I will go search for the body myself."

The devoted lover could not rid himself of the feeling that he owed that last tribute to his beloved.

He had just one hundred dollars in the savings bank, and it had taken two years of strict economy to place it there.

Besides, he had a widowed mother to support.

Fees were not plentiful nor large.

He would gladly toil night and day for his cherished parent, who had lost her eyesight and broken down in health for his sake.

But he went straight for the savings bank and when there, presented his pass-book and drew out every dollar due him.

This was carefully placed within the inner pocket of his vest. Then he went home to bid his mother good-by. He told her that business would take him away for a day or two, but she must not feel anxious. A neighbor would remain with her until his return.

Then he fondly embraced and kissed her goodbye, and three hours later he was in the city of New York.

Donald was a bright, wide-awake youth, but had he not been oppressed by the great burden of his grief, he would not have committed the blunder which he did, shortly after his arrival in the metropolis.

After making such inquiries as he could, he was convinced that the body of his beloved had not yet been found.

He thought it more than likely it never would be.

Nevertheless, he could not forgive himself, if he failed to put forth every effort at his command.

For that purpose in view he sought out some good waterman.

Ill-fortune brought him in contact with two of the worst characters in New York.

Tom Tit Tompkins and the burly black desperado, Riseup Bilkens appeared to be in want of a job, while Donald was looking for some one to take him on the wild search for the body of a woman drowned the night before.

"Where do dead bodies go, when the tide is running out?" asked Marvin of the massive dwarf.

"Out to sea, sometimes," was the grinning reply.

"That would seem to follow, as a matter of course, but you do not catch my meaning. They are often discovered, are they not?"

"Of course."

"Where?"

"In a good many places."

"But do they not tend to some particular part of the bay or river?"

"That's hard to say; sometimes they 'pears to do that, and then ag'in it's t'other way."

"Explain."

"You see they mought be carried well down the bay, when the back tide would carry 'em back ag'in beyant the spot they started from."

"I understand; the body I am searching for is that of a young lady who sprung off the New Brunswick, of the Courtlandt street line, last night, between nine and ten o'clock."

Both these men knew at once to whom he referred.

Each saw a little further into the business of the night before.

Accustomed as they were to crime, they perceived that a chance opened before them for another probable fee from the very parties who had already paid them so liberally.

Nothing in their looks or manner showed that they "twigged" to what the handsome young man said.

"Let me see."

The Tom Tit bent his head as if in deep thought; then he suddenly raised it.

"Yas, the tide was settin' out strong at that time; I remember it very well."

"Yes," assented the negro, "I rowed a gem-man out to a schooner, and it was de boss hard job dat I've done in weeks."

Donald Marvin became painfully interested.

"Knowing the river and bay as well as you do, can you not tell me where the body would be likely to float? I understand, of course, that you can do little more than guess."

"Let me see."

The Tom Tit and his dusky pal turned about and looked out to sea.

They seemed to be studying the direction of the gentle wind and the action of the tide.

At the same time they exchanged a few words in a low voice.

The waiting Marvin did not hear anything said.

They did not mean he should hear.

He supposed they were debating over the all-important matter about which they were inquiring.

So they were; but not entirely.

Had he caught the meaning of the sentences they exchanged, he would have fled from them as from a pestilence.

During this singular interview, which took place near the Battery, a fourth party watched them closely.

He was attired in a blue cheviot suit, with soft felt hat, eye glasses and a blonde mustache.

He stood but a short distance off and was engaged in whittling a small pine stick.

But his eyes were fastened on the party and he rightly surmised that the unsuspicious young man was bargaining for a ride in the small boat.

Suddenly the Tom Tit turned about.

"Over yender," said he, pointing in the direction of Communipaw, "the body may be found."

"You think it likely it has washed there?" eagerly asked young Marvin.

"We do."

"What will you charge to take me over there and to spend several hours in the search?"

"Well, boss, it ain't a pleasant business; night's comin' on and it's rather spookish hunting for dead persons. We wouldn't be willin' to undertake the job for less than ten dollars."

"I'll pay you your price and if you find the lady I'll give you double that sum."

"It's a go; jump in."

Donald Marvin quickly took his seat and the others made ready to shove off, when some one called:

"Helloa!"

Looking up, they saw the gentleman in the blue cheviot suit before them.

"Will you take me over to Communipaw with you?"

The Tom Tit and Bilkens looked suspiciously at him and hesitated.

But they observed that he was well dressed and carried a handsome gold chain to which no doubt a valuable watch was attached.

"It'll cost you five dollars."

"All right; I'm your man."

And he sprang lightly into the boat and took his seat at the stern, beside the astonished Donald Marvin.

The next minute the boat was shoved off, the dwarf caught up the oars and began rowing in the direction of Communipaw.

Night was closing in and the quarter toward which the boat was heading is one of the most dangerous at night that can be found in the New York harbor.

The new passenger was Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron.

CHAPTER XI.

OFF COMMUNIPAW IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

ORSON OXX, although a man of resources, made an occasional slip like the rest of us.

He meant to be up before light, on the morning succeeding his shadowing of Ward Hildreth to the house of widow Johnson.

But he overslept himself and did not reach the spot until several hours later than was intended.

Having decided on his course of procedure, he walked straight to the door and asked for Mr. Hildreth.

He was assured by the widow that the gentleman and ladies had left at an early hour and were not expected back.

As to anything further, of course she was profoundly ignorant; the most skillful pumping failed to extract an iota of information.

Because the widow declared that her guests had departed was not accepted by the detective as evidence that such was the fact.

He lingered in the neighborhood and held the building under surveillance for a number of hours. At the same time, he picked up some points which left no doubt in his mind that the "birds had flown."

It therefore remained for him to trace them, and this was always an annoying duty to the detective, who disliked the frequent snubbing he received from those who refused to give information.

"As they crossed the Courtlandt street ferry, or started to do so, the old fellow will be apt to avoid that place as the one likely to be inquired about."

Just there, as the reader will perceive, Orson Oxx committed another mistake.

It was the means of his losing the greater portion of the day without picking up a single clew.

Late in the afternoon, he stood near the Battery searching for the river pirates, Tom Tit Tompkins and Riseup Bilkens.

"They were the ones who picked her up after she sprung overboard," he said to himself; "and they may be made to disgorge some of their knowledge. I don't suppose they know where Hildreth and the ladies went, but the low-browed rascals must have a few points, which it would benefit me to have."

"Speak of his Satanic Majesty and he will appear!" exclaimed the detective, the next minute, when he caught sight of the two river pirates by the water's edge.

A third party was present and seemed to be trying to make some engagement with them.

Orson Oxx watched them a few minutes and then sauntered forward.

We have told how it was he secured passage on the boat.

He was actuated by several motives.

It would have been easy perhaps for him to call Donald Marvin, whom he had never seen before, from the boat, warn him of his danger and persuade him to give up his contemplated project.

Had he known that he was the lover of the girl who was supposed to be lost, most likely the detective would have taken this course.

But Orson did not catch enough of the words to learn that, though he knew the young man was searching for the body of a drowned person.

Another motive which led him to make the voyage from which the majority of men would have shrunk was the old feeling that had induced him to "play off" with many ambitious sporting men and with obstreperous bullies.

He had the time at his command; he knew Tom Tit and Bilkens to be two execrable wretches, who deserved death a dozen times over.

"I feel the need of exercise," grimly muttered the herculean detective, "and the present is a good time to work it in."

The Man of Iron, despite his failure of the day, was in good spirits, and although the stranger was disposed to be reserved and silent, yet Orson forced him into a conversation.

"I beg pardon," he remarked, shortly after the boat was under way, "but I overheard a word or two which led me to suppose you have started on a melancholy errand."

"You are right."

"You are searching for the body of a friend?"

"Such is the fact."

"May I inquire who he was?"

"It was a lady—my affianced wife."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"It was a sad affair. Her mind was unsettled from grief over the loss of her father."

"Ah! Did she leap into the river?"

"She sprung from the ferry-boat last night while crossing from Courtlandt street to Jersey City."

Orson Oxx suspected the identity of the lady for whom the young man was searching.

Now he felt that Providence had favored him.

He did not show by his manner that he knew anything of the case, though it was in his power to lift a mountainous load of grief from the shoulders of the poor fellow.

He thought it wise to wait awhile before communicating the astounding news that his beloved was no more dead than either of them.

"The trail is getting warm," he said to himself. "This young man, whose looks and appearance attest his nobility of heart, can give me all the clews I want. I shall prove myself his friend, and I will use him to unravel the mystery and to bring the guilty to punishment for their atrocious crimes."

"It seems to me," said he, in a feeling voice, "that there is but the slenderest prospect of your errand being successful."

"I am afraid not."

"The ocean is always hungry, as may be said. Multitudes are lost in it every year and month and week, and yet it calls for more."

"Alas! your words are too true."

Marvin looked off over the water and sighed. It was growing dark, and the starlike points of light were twinkling in every direction.

Puffing steam tugs were bustling hither and thither, ferry boats were moving ponderously, their walking-beams dimly discernible through the gloom as they went up and down, while other craft lay at rest on the bosom of the water.

The lights of Jersey City, of the great metropolis, of Brooklyn and other points blinked and gleamed like innumerable constellations.

The hoarse creaming of whistles, the ringing of bells and all the hum and throb of a vast teeming city were in their ears.

The Tom Tit rowed strongly and well, keeping a little to the south.

They passed several smaller boats, but no word was exchanged with them.

It had grown darker and darker.

Orson Oxx was well acquainted with New York and the surroundings, and he knew where the men were taking them.

Many a dark deed has been done off the Communipaw Flats.

Murderous river pirates steal out in the gloom, and, boarding coasters and other vessels, plunder and rob and murder.

The outgoing tide has carried many a pulseless body, which has been stabbed to death by these terrible desperadoes.

Orson Oxx knew that the Tom Tit and the negro meant to take them to a lonely spot and there rob each.

That done, they intended to pitch him and his companion overboard.

What became of the unfortunate passengers was of no account to the wretches.

If the victims could swim, possibly they might save themselves; if they could not, they must drown.

It was a matter of entire indifference to the criminals.

Suddenly a boat with three men shot out of the darkness.

It appeared so quickly that neither Orson Oxx nor his companion noticed the direction from which it came.

They rowed up as if they meant to attack the occupants, but they instantly changed their minds, for they recognized the Tom Tit and the negro, and drew off with a muttered apology.

They were too honest to trespass on the preserves of brother murderers.

Orson Oxx had been silent a minute or two; he was carefully studying their surroundings. At the same time he studied the movements of the two men.

He felt that vigilance was never more necessary than just then.

Orson Oxx and Donald Marvin were sitting at the stern. The boat was furnished with two pairs of oars, and the Tom Tit was using the couple nearest the passengers, Riseup Bilkens being on the seat just beyond.

"My friend," said the Man of Iron, speaking in a low voice, "I have something of the utmost importance to say to you."

Donald Marvin was peering through the darkness into the water surrounding them. Already he was searching for the body of his beloved, hoping yet dreading to see it, but he

instantly turned on being addressed in this fashion.

"What is it?"

He doubtless believed it referred to the sad errand which had brought him to this lonely spot.

"We must speak low," said Orson Oxx; "those two scoundrels there must not hear a word we say."

This rather vigorous language gave the young lawyer the first intimation of the character of the boatmen.

"I unders and," said he, instantly lowering his voice.

"Those fellows are river pirates."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I know them both; they have committed murder!"

"Great heavens! do they intend violence toward us?"

"They are taking us to this out-of-the-way spot on purpose to rob us."

"And then?"

"Pitch us overboard."

"And did you know that when you came aboard?"

"I did."

"Why then didn't you tell me, so that I might have kept out of the danger?"

"What difference? I warn you now."

"But I am defenseless."

"Have you no pistol?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"You had no thought of getting in such a hole?"

"Not the least."

"Ah, New York is a dreadful bad city," said the detective with a sigh, as he gazed off toward the metropolis.

"I do not understand your course," said Donald Marvin, beginning to suspect he had a lunatic for a fellow-passenger.

"I know you don't but you soon will."

"Do you expect to escape these wretches?"

"I do, and," added the young Hercules, bending close to him, "I want to make a request or two of you."

"What is it?"

"I knew these jail-birds were planning to rob you, when you agreed to pay them ten dollars to go on this search. I came along on purpose to take a hand in the business; I am fully prepared for them any minute; they are determined on robbing us, and they do not believe it possible for us to escape."

"Nor do I see how we can."

"There's where you and they make a great mistake. They are going to make a complete failure of the job."

CHAPTER XII.

A TROUBLESOME PASSENGER.

"But what is the request you have to make of me?" asked Donald Marvin.

"When the curtain goes up and the performance opens, I want you to sit still where you are."

"What for?"

"As a favor to me."

"But it is my duty to assist you in defeating these wretches."

"You can assist me best by keeping your hands off. Let it suffice that I am fully prepared."

"They are powerful and desperate men."

"I know that," quietly replied Orson Oxx, "but I can handle them both."

Prompted by a natural curiosity, Donald Marvin reached out his hand and placed it on the biceps of the Man of Iron.

As he did so, the latter closed his fist and slowly brought it back over his shoulder.

The young lawyer felt the prodigious muscle rise until it threatened to burst through the coat sleeve.

It seemed as hard as ivory, and when the astounded youth attempted to pinch it, his fingers slipped off, as though he had tried to close them upon a steel bar.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Donald, "I never saw anything like it!"

Orson Oxx smiled. He did feel some pride in his muscle, skill and strength.

"Now, do you know what I meant when I said I was prepared for them?"

"I do, but for all that I tremble for you."

"You need not; I feel the need of exercise; have I your promise to keep your hands off and to allow me to enjoy all this by myself?"

"You have."

"I know it is a little selfish, but I can't help it—hello!"

Both the river pirates ceased rowing at the same moment.

"What does that mean?" demanded Orson, looking up as if surprised.

The Tom Tit now became surly and threatening.

"This is hard work and we've 'cluded to make you two coves pay more than you 'greed to pay."

"How much do you want?"

"How much have you bloomin' coves got about your clothes?"

"I've got a watch and several hundred dollars; my friend here may have more."

Donald Marvin was on the point of correcting his champion, when the latter touched him as a signal to hold his peace.

"Wal," leered the Tom Tit, "we'll take all the spondulicks that you have for this little job."

"Countin' in de watches," struck in the negro, who was itching to get hold of the time-pieces; "I feel de need of a good chronomyter, and so does my friend, Mr. Tompkins."

"You mean to rob us then, do you?"

"Some folks would call it that," returned the Tom Tit, with a chuckle, "but we don't; it's only axin' toll. Come, you'd better be quick, and hand ober de stuff."

Orson Oxx rose to his feet, spreading them apart, so as to poise himself.

"We don't intend to pay you a cent; neither of us has given you a penny for toll, and we intend to make you take us back to the Battery without getting any pay at all."

The Tom Tit and negro laughed outright; it was the joke of the season; they had never heard anything so rich.

"Wal, there's one way of fixin' that," said the Tom Tit.

He and Riseup Bilkens had drawn their oars within the boat.

The dwarf with the prodigious shoulders rose from his seat, and made toward Orson.

"We are poor and honest men, and we must have our wages."

The Tom Tit saw that the man who defied him was large and well-proportioned, and it would be no child's play to handle him; at the same time he had not the least doubt of his ability to do so.

He halted just beyond reach, for a moment, that he might brace himself for the shock; the negro sat still watching proceedings. He was sure his employer did not need his help; he had never seen him fail in an enterprise of this kind.

Orson Oxx understood the cause of the hesitation on the part of the assailant. Too short of stature to reach the face of the young Hercules, he therefore ducked his head and made a lunge at him, to drive his bullet head into the stomach of his victim, and knock the breath if not the life from his body.

But he made a slight mistake. Just as the ruffian lowered his head, the Man of Iron reached his hand over and gripped the dwarf by the back of the neck, and his fingers closed with resistless force. At the same instant, Orson jammed his hand downward.

The vertebrae cracked and it looked for the moment as if he had broken the neck of the wretch, but on the instant, Orson Oxx changed his grip and with lightning-like quickness grasped him by the shoulders.

A hand was on either side of the brawny desperado, who began struggling to free himself, muttering the most fearful curses.

And then, amazing as it may seem, Orson Oxx lifted the wretch clean from his feet and swung him aloft as though he were a coat which he was flinging over his head preparatory to putting on.

"Bilkens!" roared the victim, "why don't you help?"

The negro saw how matters were going and felt that it was high time for him to interfere.

"Dat's jes' what dis chile am a-gwine to do; I dinks dat you hab got a little off yar base, Mas-ser Tom Tit. I'm de young gemmen dat butted de bull off de bridge and I nebber yet hab found de white trash dat I couldn't handle as easy—"

At the moment Riseup Bilkens began talking, he also began rising to his feet, and at the instant of reaching the word last given above, he was fully up, with fists clinched, muscles braced and on the point of going for the reckless white man.

But just then the reckless white man went for him!

Oxx held the Tom Tit in his mighty grasp as helpless as if he were an infant. His short legs were beating the air, while he writhed and wriggled with all the strength at his command; but it was useless.

The astounded Donald Marvin sitting at the stern caught the outlines of the short limbs against the starlit sky; the next instant they made a sweeping circle downward, like the spokes of a revolving wheel.

Orson Oxx used the Tom Tit as an instrument with which to punish the black brute.

The heels of the Tom Tit came down on the head and shoulders of Riseup as if they were the arch of a falling tunnel.

He imagined, as he collapsed under the fearful avalanche that his head had been driven down between his heels and he was going through the bottom of the boat.

As it was he was considerably demoralized.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETURN TRIP.

HAVING used the Tom Tit for the purpose of crushing his adversary, Orson Oxx now flung him overboard—sending the ruffian fully a dozen feet away, where he sunk under the surface; then, before the dazed African could rise, he had him by the throat.

"Come, we can get along without you."

The terrified negro made a brief, terrific struggle, clutching desperately at the side of the boat, as he felt himself being lifted upward by that remorseless grasp.

But all in vain; there was the dizzying, spinning sensation which one feels when going swiftly through the air, then a splash, as he sprawled on the surface and went down, just as the Tom Tit came up.

Having discharged his cargo, Orson Oxx sat down on the stern again to look over the manifest.

The instant the river pirates came to the surface they swam toward the boat.

There was no refuge within reach, for the tide was running very fast.

As they approached, Orson addressed them.

"Before you can come aboard, you must promise me one or two things."

The wretches were swimming close to the boat, afraid to catch hold of it, but neither spoke.

The Man of Iron said, addressing the Tom Tit:

"I will let you in the boat on condition that you row us back to the Battery and not charge a cent. What do you say?"

"We can't help ourselves," growled Tom Tit.

"Your head is level there. Climb in the boat; I won't ask any promise of you; if you want to start the circus again, I'm willing."

"Say," suddenly asked the negro, with his hands on the boat, while his black face peered over the gunwale, "am you de chap what dey calls de Man ob Iron?"

"I am the man."

"De Lord gracious heben!" gasped the African, dropping back into the water; "den you am de debbil!"

And turning about, he swam away in the darkness, ready to rush to any refuge rather than enter the craft in which that dreadful personage sat.

It was a fatal mistake of the miserable wretch.

Although a strong swimmer, the tide was too much for him. He was unable to effect a landing anywhere, and, as he refused to call for help, through fear that the boat he had just left would bear down upon him, he finally succumbed.

Society was the better for the loss of the dusky desperado.

The Tom Tit showed more sense. Availing himself of the permission, he scrambled into the boat, and immediately began rowing back to the Battery.

Orson Oxx turned to Donald Marvin, who expressed his unbounded wonder over the exploit of the marvelous detective, and said:

"You see we have started on our return; are you willing to give up the search for the body of the missing lady?"

"I am convinced it is useless to search, where the field is so vast—the chances against us are infinite."

"You are right; but the lady, Miss Eva Hildreth, I know, is—alive, and well!"

"What?"

The astounded lover sprang to his feet, quivering with excitement, and almost beside himself.

"I beg you sit down again," said Orson, gently forcing him back; "the waves make the boat unsteady."

"What do you mean?"

"I told you the simple truth; your affianced wife is alive and well."

"But—but—but she was rescued, then?"

"She was not, for she has not been in danger. It was another person altogether who leaped off the ferry-boat last night, and who was mistaken for your beloved."

Donald Marvin leaned forward and clutched the arm of the Man of Iron. His breath came short and fast, like one who feels the crisis of his life bearing down upon him with terrific rapidity.

"Do you speak the truth? If you are jesting, it will kill me!"

"I am the last man in the world who would jest upon such a matter."

"Then you say it was not my Eva who sprang into the river last night?"

"She never leaped from the ferry boat as was reported; it was another person altogether."

"But," persisted Donald Marvin, who seemed to be in doubt whether he heard aright, "I cannot understand all this. How was such a blunder committed?"

"There was no blunder about it. It was a deliberate put-up job, intended to give the impression that she was dead."

"For what purpose?"

"I have not been able as yet to determine the precise cause, though I begin to suspect it. Her companion last night, or rather the companion of the young woman who personated her, was an elderly man, who claimed to be her uncle—"

"It was her uncle Ward, the oily-tongued villain who actually called on me to-day in Philadelphia, and pretended to shed tears over the loss of his niece."

"What object has he in pretending that his niece is dead?"

"That is difficult to say. Miss Hildreth's father was very wealthy when he died—"

"That settles it," broke in Orson Oxx; "this young lady stands between him and the property which he wishes to secure. He means to give the impression that the young lady is dead, and to keep her out of the way until he can get possession of her inheritance."

"But he is running a great risk."

"All scoundrels do."

"He is sure to be detected."

"He expects to get out of the country before the discovery comes, or he may—"

"Put his niece out of the way."

"He has done that already."

"But you just assured me she was alive."

"So she is. I mean to say that he has managed to place her in retirement, where he means to keep her until he can secure the property."

"But he may kill her!"

"He is wicked enough to do so if necessary, but he is not likely to find it necessary."

"Where is his niece?"

"If you had put that question to me last night I could have answered it."

"And now you cannot?"

"No; her uncle left with her and her companion early this morning."

"And reached Philadelphia, for he called upon me as I just told you."

"He did, but he has sent them somewhere else."

"How do you know that?"

"I know that he went to Philadelphia because you have just told me; I know that the ladies did not go there, for he is too cunning a villain to arrange the complete overthrow of his wicked schemes by such a course."

It required but a few minutes for these two men to understand each other thoroughly.

Knowing that Orson Oxx must be a detective from what he had said, and admiring the tremendous strength, activity and skill he had shown in his contest with the river pirates, Donald Marvin felt he had gained a most valuable friend.

As we have shown, he unbosomed himself to the Man of Iron, who thereby gained much valuable information, which helped him to understand more of the singular business than he had suspected up to that time.

Before the boat reached the Battery, the Tom Tit stopped rowing.

Orson Oxx turned upon him like a flash.

"What is that for?"

"I wanted to ax ye, beggin' pardon, what do you s'pose has become of Bilkens?"

"He's reached shore somewhere," replied the detective, "a man that is born to be hung won't be drowned."

"I'm obleeged to ye, for the assuring information; Rise up is a good square man, wouldn't lie or steal or do anything wrong for the world; he's too bloomin' good to be spared."

The river pirate was much relieved by the mistaken belief of the detective, and dipped his oars again, when his master commanded him to rest upon them a minute or two longer.

The Man of Iron had been looking for the river pirates during the day, and, although he had got much from the lover, yet it would have been unwise to allow the Tom Tit to go away without yielding what information he might possess.

Orson Oxx therefore proceeded to question him closely as to the precise reasons why he happened to be at hand to pick up the young lady who sprung from the ferry-boat.

The river pirate told very little if any more than what the sagacious detective had suspected.

He and Bilkens were ready in accordance with an agreement made with Swank.

The work performed by the river pirates was slight, but they were so well paid that they were only too anxious to do their part of the contract.

"Go ahead," said the detective, with a wave of the hand; "land us at the Battery as quickly as possible; if you want any pay for this trip, I will settle with you."

"I guess we won't open that 'ere bloomin' account ag'in," muttered the humbled desperado, applying himself to the oars once more.

A few minutes later, the landing was effected and Tom Tit Tompkins breathed more freely, when the figure of the wonderful Man of Iron, and the friend at his elbow, vanished in the gloom.

CHAPTER XIV.

GROPING FOR LIGHT.

"WHAT you have told me," said Orson Oxx to his young friend, in whom he had become deeply interested, "establishes several important facts."

"What are they?"

"We will make our way to the hotel, where we can sit down and discuss the matter without disturbance."

Shortly after they were seated in a private room at the Merchant's Hotel, on Courtlandt street.

"There can be no doubt that Ward Hildreth, whom you know to be the uncle of your affianced wife, is a plotting villain."

"There is not the remotest doubt that such is the fact."

"His brother, before he died, must have willed his property in such a way that it will go to his surviving brother in the event of the death of the daughter."

"Undoubtedly such was the truth."

"Ward Hildreth has arranged this pretended suicide so as to give the impression that his niece is dead."

"That seems equally clear."

"He is wicked enough to kill her, but judging from what he has done, he is afraid. The woman who sprung overboard must have figured as the daughter of Ward and the cousin of your betrothed."

"Such I happen to know is the fact."

"But she cannot be; she is an adventuress with a most wonderful amount of daring and nerve."

"Of that I know nothing."

"I have no doubt on the point. Well, the three started for Philadelphia this morning. He has gone straight through to the city, called on you, and then he has met some brother conspirator there, with whom he is arranging to get possession of the property."

"Your theory seems fully proven."

"But Eva and her pretended cousin have left the main road at some point, and are now hiding."

"How could Eva be persuaded to be a party to such a suspicious proceeding?"

"She has been deceived by her uncle and the other woman, both of whom are working in harmony."

"Still I cannot perceive how she could be misled."

"It will soon be made plain."

"And what are we to do?"

"Find out where the ladies are."

"How can that be done?"

"By using the brains our Creator has given us."

After a minute's silence, spent by Donald Marvin in deep thought, he said:

"I can now understand several matters which mystified and troubled me."

"What are they?"

"I have received no letters from Eva very lately. The last two make no mention of having received my last. She did not notify me when she was to start for home, nor did she let me know of her arrival in New York, as she agreed to do, so that I might meet her."

"All that, as a matter of course, she attempted to do through her uncle."

"Most certainly, and he has manipulated it to suit his purposes, without arousing her suspicion."

"The three bought tickets for Philadelphia this morning. He went on and they left the main line at some point and are now awaiting his pleasure in some secluded place."

"Have you any theory as to where that place is?"

"Yes; I consider it quite certain they did not leave the cars at any city or town like Newark, Elizabeth, Rahway, New Brunswick, Trenton or Bristol, since that would have been likely to defeat their purpose of finding a secure hiding-place."

"That would seem reasonable."

"They have not gone to the northern part of New Jersey, because that is pretty well settled. In my judgment, therefore, they left the cars at some unimportant station. Possibly they did so at Trenton or Bristol and then went back in the country."

"Have you found out the train on which they left New York?"

"I think I did, and I find that it stopped at a good many places between here and Philadelphia. We must search for them at several points."

"Now, it seems to me," said Donald, "that they would be likely to get off at a place of which they knew something."

"Undoubtedly, but how are we to learn where it is until we come to make an investigation?"

"I remember hearing Eva speak of a secluded resort along the Jersey Coast, where her father was fond of going when a young man, and which she had visited several times in his company."

"Where is it?"

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of Squan village, which stands back a mile or two from the ocean."

Orson Oxx slapped his knee in excitement.

"That's good. That's a big help."

"But I do not know the route by which they reached the point."

"I do, provided they went there."

"Where is it?"

"At Monmouth Junction, not quite half-way between here and Philadelphia."

"How, then, would they proceed?"

"From Monmouth Junction they went by rail through Jamesburg, Freehold and so on toward what are called the Pines. They may have continued on to Squan village, or they

may have turned off at one of the stations, long before reaching there."

"You seem confident, Mr. Oxx, that we have discovered the right trail."

"I am very hopeful of such being the case, and yet I have been just as hopeful many a time before and found myself woefully mistaken. It may be the same now."

"I am so exalted by the discovery that Eva is alive, that I can hardly restrain myself."

The face of the young lover was all aglow, and, springing to his feet, he paced back and forth as if to prevent his shouting with pleasure.

"It is a delight indeed, but we cannot find the young lady too soon."

Donald stopped short and looked at the detective with a startled expression.

"What do you mean?"

"You admit that Ward Hildreth is a consummate scoundrel?"

"That has been proven, but he is not in the company of Eva now."

"All true enough, but she is in the power of one doubly worse, and capable of doing her more harm."

"You mean her pretended cousin, Cora?"

"I do."

"Why rank her as so much more dangerous than her uncle?"

"As a really good woman is so much better than a man, so is one who is really bad, tenfold worse. The acts of this adventuress prove that she possesses an almost miraculous amount of nerve and daring; she can play the saint, but she is a fallen angel. Take a woman to fight a woman."

"What is she likely to do?"

"Eva believes her a most devoted friend, and yet this woman would not hesitate to strangle her, should the necessity arise. Ward Hildreth, with all his wickedness, is restrained by fear, for in these modern days, it is a dangerous thing to take a human life. With the woman Cora, it is different."

"But why should she harm Eva?" asked the horrified lover.

"She may not do so, unless she believes it necessary for the success of her schemes."

"Then, as you say, we cannot recover Eva too soon."

"Certainly not; it will take Ward Hildreth a considerable while to secure possession of the property in Philadelphia, that is the real estate, though it won't take him long to lay his hands on the personal property. He may find that large enough to supply his wants and may draw out while we are hunting for the lost heiress."

"I hope he will not succeed, but everything now should give way to the duty of finding Eva Hildreth."

"I agree with you. And now let's go to sleep."

"You may sleep, but I cannot."

"Nonsense! You must learn to do so. Try it, and in the morning we will start with renewed vigor and unabated determination."

CHAPTER XV.

A PERILOUS MISTAKE.

THE hint thrown out by Orson Oxx as to the dangerous character of Cora Hildreth produced a greater effect than he anticipated.

Donald Marvin became so disturbed and uneasy and full of misgiving that he refused to go to bed.

At his earnest desire the detective rearranged the course of action he had decided on.

It was settled that Donald should take the next train for Philadelphia.

Reaching that city he would turn about and board the early morning train which stopped at Bristol.

He would make inquiries, not only at that station but at others, in case he failed to pick up a clew at the first.

It was figured out by the time-table that he would reach Monmouth Junction early in the afternoon.

Orson Oxx would be there long before, as he intended to proceed directly from Jersey City.

If the Man of Iron picked up a clew he would follow it at once, in the direction of the Pines or wheresoever it led.

If he failed to learn anything he would wait for Donald.

If the latter made any important discovery he was to telegraph Orson Oxx, who would join him at the earliest possible moment.

In the event of Orson Oxx gaining trace of the two young women, he would leave a message at the telegraph office at the station.

Then Donald could follow on after him without trouble.

It would seem that, with such an explicit understanding, there could be no miscarriage of plans. But we shall see.

Orson Oxx would have preferred to prosecute this hunt entirely alone.

The presence of an impatient lover at his elbow was likely to be a hindrance rather than a help.

But it was impossible to refuse the company of Donald Marvin, of whom he had become very fond.

Besides which the Man of Iron saw the appro-

priateness of the young lover bearing a hand in the rescue of his beautiful and imperiled mistress.

Having bid him good-night, the detective turned in for a refreshing sleep.

Just before closing his eyes he almost started out of bed.

"My gracious! how came I to forget it?" he asked himself. "It was a bad oversight."

He sprang to his feet and looked at his watch.

"It is too late. His train has gone, or I would overhaul him and put him on his guard."

What was it that alarmed Orson Oxx to such an extent?

During all his conversation with Donald Marvin, he had never once referred to Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff, the two ruffians who were unquestionably associated with Ward Hildreth in pushing through this evil conspiracy.

How he failed to do so, the detective could not tell.

"I think the old fellow will use them to guard the retreat where the young women have gone, or he may use them to pipe us."

"He knows that to succeed, he must neglect no precaution."

"He suspects that I am trying to mix up in the business."

"They must know that this young fellow is the betrothed of Eva Hildreth and he will be likely to make desperate efforts to recover her body."

"He may gain an inkling of the truth."

"They will watch him closely."

"If he does get on the trail, they will follow him."

"If necessary they will knock him in the head."

"I wonder they did not dog him from Philadelphia."

"It must have been because he left before they could make their preparations to do so."

"I ought to have given him warning, else while the hunter goes to hunt the tiger, the tiger will hunt him."

"Heaven protect him and the right."

And with this prayer on his lips, he closed his eyes.

But it was a long time before he slept.

In the morning he felt more uneasy than ever.

He hurriedly ate his breakfast and caught the first train which stopped at Monmouth Junction.

This left New York at 8:20 city time, and the scheduled time for Monmouth Junction was 10:05.

He reached that point not quite ten minutes late.

He inclined to believe that the young ladies, for whom he was hunting must have preceded him by just twenty-four hours.

He therefore made inquiries for the two passengers by that train of the day before.

When he described them, as having been dressed in deep mourning, and as very beautiful, one of the officials remembered both distinctly.

"I take it for granted they were purty," said he, with a grin; "though I didn't get a look at either face, 'cause they were so heavily veiled, their veils reaching almost to their feet, but they had such sweet voices that they must have been handsome."

"They were alone?"

"Yes."

"Had they any baggage?"

"Yes, one trunk, a regular three story Saratoga, that weighed about a ton. It was covered all over with labels and must have been in a foreign country."

"Where did they check it to?"

"To Farmingdale, I think, though I didn't take partickler notice; I can find out."

"I'll be obliged if you will."

In a few minutes the official returned with the announcement that the important trunk had been forwarded to a place called Farmingdale, in Monmouth county.

Orson Oxx found that he could leave in a few minutes, but he inclined to wait for Donald Marvin.

"Perhaps there's a telegram for me," he said, recalling the arrangement agreed upon.

When he inquired, sure enough he was handed a yellow envelope, with a dispatch inclosed.

It was from a point down the road, and read as follows:

"Have struck the trail; come at once; if I don't hear from you within a half-hour, will go alone; two friends got off with me. D. M."

The heart of Orson Oxx almost stood still when he read these words, which were a great deal more significant than the sender imagined.

He saw that it had been sent fully an hour before.

Nevertheless he telegraphed a reply on the instant:

"You are mistaken; come here at once; I have tracked them; you have been entrapped; those friends are enemies. O. O."

This message was forwarded at once, but the accommodating telegraphist, in answer to his inquiry, was informed that the party to whom the message was sent had left the station some time before.

The dispatch would be delivered him on his return.

"He is entrapped, as sure as heaven!" muttered Orson Oxx, with white, compressed lips.

"Those two friends are Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff."

"Donald Marvin is in more danger than Eva Hildreth, his betrothed."

"She must wait awhile while I look after him."

The next train southward bore Orson Oxx, hastening to the rescue of the one whom he had already befriended in such an important manner.

And there was need of urgent haste.

CHAPTER XVI.

DONALD MARVIN MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

It would be a hard matter for any one to explain the impressions, which in his mind, sometimes settle convictions.

When Donald Marvin departed from Philadelphia, in the gray light of early morning it was with a belief that Eva Hildreth and her companion had left the train the day before, at no great distance out from the city.

He had settled upon a certain station as the one where he was likely to pick up some of the lost threads for which he was hunting.

It is hardly worth our while to give the name of this station, at least for the present.

There were a large number of passengers on that early morning train, and among them were two who were very sociable and communicative to the young lawyer.

The latter was so thrilled with pleasure to learn that his beloved was alive, that he could not feel otherwise than in good spirits.

He started with alarm now and then, when he recalled that she was missing and was to a certain extent in personal danger.

But that was so infinitely preferable to death, that he felt profoundly grateful.

He slept a great deal in going to Philadelphia, on the slow night line, secured his breakfast at the latter point and felt well equipped for the work before him.

Naturally enough he fell into conversation with the person who shared his seat with him.

Donald found that he had traveled a good deal and became interested in his account of his experiences.

There was no special cause for young Marvin to be reticent nor did he hesitate to say that he was going to leave the train at a small station in Pennsylvania.

"I regret that such is the fact, for I shall feel the loss of your company."

"That's odd," remarked the other gentleman, who sat facing them and smoking a very good cigar, "but that is the station where we are to stop for a day or possibly only an hour or two."

Donald was delighted.

"I am looking for a friend," added the young legal gentleman, with just the slightest compunctions of conscience.

"Ours is a matter of business and it may not detain us more than an hour or so."

His companions did not seem to feel any special curiosity to learn more about the friend whom Donald wished to see.

Had they expressed much curiosity, Donald might have felt suspicious.

But they devoted themselves to be entertaining and agreeable.

They succeeded admirably, for no one understood the art more perfectly than they.

They were too wise to propose any quiet game at cards, or to arouse the suspicion of their new acquaintance in any manner.

Donald therefore was pleased when they left the train at the same time with him.

One immediately went over to a man who seemed to be a farmer, waiting with no particular business in view.

They talked several minutes.

The interview was very earnest, especially on the part of Luff Swank, who gave the countryman five dollars on condition that he would follow his instructions.

While this little scheme was being hatched, Donald Marvin was quietly prosecuting his inquiries about two young ladies, dressed in mourning, who were supposed to have left the cars at that station on the preceding day.

He learned nothing, and was inquiring the next train on which he could depart, when Luff Swank approached.

He addressed his companion, Hank Wagsnaff, taking care that Donald should hear his words.

"Houghton broke his engagement."

"The mischief! How?"

"By not coming, of course."

"Did he send no excuse?"

"None."

"He's a fraud!"

"My opinion exactly. This gentleman was here yesterday, when the early morning train from New York stopped."

At this point the countryman came forward, and shook hands with Wagsnaff, who addressed him like an old acquaintance.

"I beg pardon, Van Cleve, I didn't know you. Did you have any passengers yesterday?"

"Only two young ladies, that wanted board in a quiet place for several days."

"Who were they?"

"I forget their names. They didn't have much to say; were in deep mourning, and suffering with sorrier, I should suppose."

As may be supposed, Donald Marvin was on the *qui vi e*.

"How far from here do you live?" asked he.

Before the countryman could answer, Luff Swank struck in.

"Van Cleve is an old friend of ours. He lives about a mile out beyond that stretch of woods yonder. Houghton, whom we expected to meet, is staying for the summer at a farmhouse just beyond. He ought to be here to see us, but he hasn't come."

"What will you do?"

"There must have been some misunderstanding."

Wagsnaff spoke up.

"We shall have to drive out there."

Naturally enough, Donald Marvin was convinced that he had struck the trail of Eva, at the very beginning, as may be said of the hunt.

He walked over to the farmer, and interviewed him.

Mr. Van Cleve, fortunately, was not obliged to descend into particulars.

All he had to do was to stick to his original version which was simplicity itself.

He had taken a couple of young ladies to his home to remain several days.

Both were very pretty, but he had forgotten their names.

When asked when he meant to go home, Mr. Van Cleve said he was waiting for the down train to Philadelphia and would not be back until night, when his carriage would come to meet him.

Just then Luff Swank approached.

"We have just hired a team to drive over to Houghton's; if you will go along we shall be obliged."

Donald intended to procure a team for himself, but that was hard at such a small place.

It would be very pleasant to ride over with these two gentlemen, leaving their vehicle at the gate of Mr. Van Cleve and going straight to Eva Hildreth.

When the two should meet, it would be easy to determine their future course.

No one would presume to interfere with them.

He therefore accepted the invitation with pleasure.

Before starting he sent the telegram already quoted to Orson Oxx, at Monmouth Junction.

The vehicle contained two seats, Donald sitting on the front with the driver, while Swank and Wagsnaff occupied the one directly behind them.

The driver was a stupid countryman who hung around the station, with a dilapidated team, on the lookout for a job.

He didn't know anything, and after some futile attempts to pump him, Marvin let him alone.

Up to this moment, Donald Marvin had not held the shadow of a suspicion against these two persons, who sat behind him, smoking and making jokes.

But they had gone less than half a mile, when he caught a singular expression which it may be said a jolt in the carriage flung into his ear.

"We've got him dead to rights!"

That single expression let in the whole truth upon the brain of the young lover.

It was like a blinding streak of lightning across the midnight sky.

He understood on the instant that these men were in the employ of Ward Hildreth and they had been dogging him from the moment he left the station in Philadelphia.

Fool that he was never to suspect them. He ought to have avoided them from the first.

They had drawn the countryman into the scheme and the only business which led them to stop at this out-of-the-way station was to checkmate him.

"They are shrewd, cunning villains who would not have been hired to go into this affair, if they would hesitate before any crime; they mean to get me into their power and then kill me."

What was to be done?

As yet Donald had no pistol, but he was not the one to yield without a struggle.

CHAPTER XVII.

AMONG THE JERSEY PINES.

YOUNG Donald Marvin was too sensible a man to suppose that the two persons sitting behind him meant quietly to shoot or put him to death in broad daylight or in an open manner.

They were too steeped in crime to incur any such risk.

They intended quietly to manipulate matters so as to get him out of the way forever, by making it appear that he was killed accidentally.

There were many methods by which that could be done.

He did not feel safe while sitting on the seat.

A pistol in the hand of one of them might go off "accidentally."

There were half a dozen methods by which the cunning villains could encompass his death.

The only recourse was to get out of their company.

They had just passed through a long stretch of woods, when they came opposite a small farm-house standing at the edge.

"Who lives there?" asked Donald, starting up.

"Mr. Jones—Josiah Jones."

"Is that so? Why, he's the very man I want to see; hold up a few minutes."

In a twinkling the young man had leaped out and gone through the gate, before Swank and Wagsnaff understood what he was doing.

"Wait there a few minutes," he said, waving his hand to the astonished passengers.

They looked as if they were undecided what to do about it.

But it was out of their power to prevent the young gentleman from doing as he pleased.

Donald knocked at the door and the woman of the house answered.

He saluted and walked in without any invitation, somewhat to her surprise and displeasure.

When the door was closed he said:

"Madam, I beg pardon for intruding, but there are two persons in the carriage out yonder from whom I wish to get away; they are not agreeable company, and the only way to part with them is by using a little strategy. I pretended I wanted to speak with you, so as to gain time. Now, if you will permit me, I will pass out the back way, and when they call to ask for me you can tell them the truth. Here is a trifle for troubling you."

He placed a silver half-dollar in her hand, and then deliberately walked through the house and out by the rear.

During all this time the lady of the house never spoke a word.

She seemed unable to grasp the situation.

At the moment Donald Marvin was climbing the fence, a vigorous bull-dog made a lunge after him, but the exceptional dexterity of the youth saved him.

While Donald Marvin was hurrying through the woods in the direction of the railroad station, he was inclined to suspect he had been unnecessarily alarmed, and was cutting a rather ridiculous figure in fleeing before an imaginary danger.

But when he reached the station and read the reply of Orson Oxx, he congratulated himself on his safe escape.

The only matter now which annoyed him was the disarrangement caused by his own action.

A little study of the time-tables, however, showed him that he could intercept the detective at a station beyond, before Orson could reach the point at which Donald had left the train.

This was a great relief, for young Marvin was naturally anxious to get away from the station previous to the return of the two scoundrels who were plotting his ruin.

Fortune favored him.

A few minutes after his arrival a train steamed up, and he boarded it.

He looked down the road in the direction he had come and, with a throbbing heart, discerned a carriage approaching at a rapid gait.

He had no doubt it contained the two villains, who were hastening to catch the train.

He now held them in no special fear, but it would be exceedingly disagreeable to encounter them.

Besides, a good march would be stolen on them if he could leave them at this station and effect a junction with Orson Oxx before they could interfere.

The conductor saw the carriage approaching at a tremendous pace.

But the modern railroad doesn't wait for belated passengers.

The engine began puffing and moved northward, leaving the two foiled villains struggling vainly to reach the station in time, and venting their chagrin in imprecations on the poor horse, which could not be pounded into going faster than a mile in twenty minutes.

A half-hour later, when Orson Oxx's train steamed into the Trenton station, he was surprised and delighted to see Donald Marvin walk down the aisle toward him smiling and pleased.

They shook hands, stepped out on the platform and took the next train for Monmouth Junction.

Donald quickly told his experience.

"You were rather fresh in taking up with the two strangers so suddenly. I have formed many pleasant acquaintances while traveling, but I never give them my confidence nor put myself in their power."

"Do you think they would have done me harm?"

"They would had they gained the opportunity, for I know them both to be sanguinary villains. But they might not have got the chance. It was fortunate that you gave them the slip you did in such a clever manner."

"What will they do?"

"They know where the ladies are staying, and it is their duty to prevent our discovering them. I wonder that they are not in this train, but you may depend they will be close behind us."

"You are certain Eva and Cora left the cars at Monmouth Junction?"

"There isn't a particle of doubt about it. The big trunk which carried the effects of both was checked to Farmingdale, a small station below Freehold, where the Pennsylvania crosses the tracks of the Southern. They are somewhere in that neighborhood."

"And while we are hunting them, these two scoundrels will be trailing us; is that it?"

"That's it, precisely."

"Will it not mix matters somewhat?"

"It may."

"Can they not defeat our purpose?"

"I do not see how that can be done, but," said the detective, earnestly, "we must meet cunning with cunning. Swank and Wagsnaff are close behind us; they may overtake us at Monmouth Junction, but as this is the summer time, there are a good many trains running to the sea-shore, and I hope to keep ahead of them."

"Of course that will be a great advantage."

"Their first effort will be to learn whether you and I got off at Monmouth Junction. It will be hard, and I think impossible for them to make sure on that point; probably they suspect I am in this business, but they do not know what disguise I have adopted for the present. There is nothing about your dress or appearance to attract attention; how then are they to distinguish either of us when making inquiries?"

"If there are not many tickets sold for Farmingdale, they may gain a clew by that means."

"There you have struck it," said Orson Oxx, pleased with the quickness of his young friend. "After all, your rather absurd adventure of this morning may prove a help to us."

"By giving them such a vivid idea of my veridancy that they will conclude I never can find what I am searching for?"

"Hardly as bad as that, but they are not likely to hold you in much fear. But, I was about to say I will buy a ticket to Long Branch and you can purchase one for Ocean Grove. A great many people are going to

those points at this time in the year, so we shall be lost in the crowd, so to speak."

"Will not our getting off the cars attract remark?"

"Not necessarily, if managed right."

"How is that?"

"When we step out at Monmouth Junction we must act as though we were strangers to each other."

"But at Farmingdale?"

"Quietly go to the rear, wait till the train moves off, and then step to the ground, on the side beyond the platform."

"And then?"

"And then we will decide anew what is to be done next."

"But, if Farmingdale is such a small station it may be our train does not stop there."

"We can determine that easily enough."

A few inquiries led Orson Oxx to decide they were in luck.

The car in which they were then riding switched off at Monmouth Junction, making a halt of only two or three minutes.

Thus it was impossible for Swank and Wagsnaff to overtake them at that point.

It also stopped at Farmingdale, provided there were any passengers to get off or on, the station being a signal one.

"We will take our chances," quietly remarked the detective. "It is best to buy our tickets of the conductor for the points mentioned."

"Suppose we are carried beyond Farmingdale?"

"It will only delay matters slightly. We won't be many miles out of the way, and we can come back."

Accordingly, this plan was followed.

Once more their good fortune attended them.

Below Freehold a casual inquiry of the conductor made known the fact that he had no passengers for Farmingdale, and unless the red flag was out, the train would thunder across the track of the New Jersey Southern at the rate of forty miles an hour.

Donald Marvin thought it best to get off boldly, as he could see no cause for such secrecy of movement.

Their errand was a legitimate one, and why take such extra precautions against pursuit when all the advantages were on their own side?

But Orson Oxx shook his head.

When they approached the barren region in the midst of which the quaint old village of Farmingdale stands, the train began braking up.

Orson Oxx thrust his head through the window and looked ahead.

"We are going to stop. I see several passengers waiting, and the signal is out."

He hurried back to the rear car, while Donald Marvin stayed where he was.

Both did as agreed, and dropped from the platform when the train was moving ahead again.

They came together smilingly after the cars were out of sight down the single track.

"Well, here we are among the Jersey pines," remarked the detective. "Up yonder lies the hamlet of Farmingdale, from which your friend, Mr. Hildreth, traveled in a stage most likely, when he made his visits to the sea-shore."

"It may be that Cora, who you say is such a cunning adventuress, has played a trick on us, and they did not get off at this place."

"That is possible, but if their trunk was checked for this point it must have been left here."

"Is it certain?"

"Rather say it is very probable. I do not think we shall have any difficulty in finding out."

CHAPTER XVIII.

JAKE CALKINS.

ORSON OXX met with more difficulty than he anticipated.

The day was drawing to a close, and there were signs of a heavy storm gathering in the West.

The official of whom they made inquiry had no recollection of the ladies and the large trunk.

There was so much travel from every direction that he could not undertake to tax his mind in that fashion.

Very probably the parties of whom they wished information had got off there and their

baggage may have been transferred to the station above.

Accordingly Orson Oxx and Donald Marvin made their way to the point named, where a large old-fashioned hotel stands.

There they encountered the same trouble.

No one seemed to have any recollection of the parties, all which might have been, had the ladies left the cars at that point.

"I didn't expect this difficulty," said the detective, "but when you strike a company that don't know anything, they are examples of monumental stupidity."

They went into the hotel and procured a meal.

On the outside were seated several persons on the long bench which extends along the covered porch, close to the house itself.

One of these was a tall, sunburned fellow, with long yellow hair, a raggy goatee, and he was continually spitting tobacco-juice over the neighborhood.

He had a whip in one hand, with whose lash he was flirting at the flies that were becoming drowsy with the approach of night.

He was laughing and talking in a loud voice about crops, politics and anything that came in his mind.

The fact that he had the whip in his hand, and that two sleepy horses with drooping heads, were standing a short distance away, fastened to a post, caused Orson Oxx to suspect he was the owner of the team.

"Can I speak with you a minute?" asked the detective, addressing the expectorating individual who looked up and asked:

"Do you mean me?"

"Yes."

"I'm always ready for business," he remarked, rising to his feet, brushing the dust off his trousers and stepping up to the two well-dressed gentlemen who seemed interested in him.

"Is that your team?" asked Orson Oxx, pointing to the sleepy horses.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you carry passengers out in the country?"

"I do when there are any to carry, but since the ternal railroad was built, there's mighty little doing."

"Have you had any work of the kind today?"

"Not a darned thing."

"When was your last job?"

"Yesterday."

"May I ask what it was?"

As he made the inquiry, the detective produced his cigar-case and extended it to the countryman.

Although he never smoked himself, yet he found it convenient to carry the weed with him.

"Why I took a couple of young ladies out to Sam Turner's; they wa'n't much of a load themselves, but they had a trunk about the size of the hotel there; I swow it beat anything I ever sot eyes on. I wanted to put wheels under it and carry them and the old carriage inside."

And the countryman threw back his head and hee hawed uproariously over his own wit.

"Where is Sam Turner's?"

"Wal, I ca'kerlate it's about two miles out."

"In what direction?"

"Straight down the road yender, among the Pines."

"We want you to take us there."

"I don't know 'bout that," said the fellow, looking dubiously up at the sky; "there's a reg'lar rip-tearin' storm coming and Jake Calkins—that's me—likes to be under his roof on such auspicious occasions."

"Shall we wait till morning?" asked Orson, turning toward his friend; "I think it is perfectly safe."

"No, no," replied Donald who was feverishly impatient; "I will go wild if I am compelled to stay in this lonely place all night, knowing she is so near."

"She's a mighty peart looking creatur'," was the impertinent remark of Jake Calkins, who heard the reply of the lover.

"What will you charge to take us out to Turner's at once?"

"And bring you back?"

"No."

"It orter be worth fifty cents apiece."

"We'll pay it; are you ready to start?"

"Yas, but, gentlemen," said Jake Calkins with a meaning grin, "don't you think we'd better wet our whistle afore we goes out and

run the risk of gettin' wet? I take mine straight if it's all the same to you."

He made a suggestive movement toward the broad steps leading down to the bar-room.

Orson Oxx handed him a quarter.

"We don't drink; get what you want and hurry out."

Jake Calkins followed the suggestion, beyond question, as he came up the steps a minute later, drawing his sleeve across his wide mouth and winking one eye.

Then he picked up his quid of tobacco from the bench where he had economically placed it, restored it to his mouth and announced that everything was ready.

Immediately after he was driving over one of the sandy roads leading out of the village of Farmingdale into the Pines, as they are called, and which cover hundreds of square miles of that portion of New Jersey.

Jake Calkins, having started his team, was disposed to sit sideways on the front seat, and keep up a conversation with his passengers.

But the latter did not encourage this sociability, and intimated that they preferred he should devote his energies to getting the best possible speed out of his sorry nags.

"All right," he said, with a grunt, bringing his whip down on the backs of the horses, who merely switched their tails, without increasing their gait.

The darkness rapidly deepened.

The thunder grew louder and more frequent, and the vivid flashes of lightning cut the gloom as with flaming swords.

A terrific storm was at hand.

The horses walked steadily along, as if they felt no earthly interest in the approaching war of the elements.

Suddenly the heavy drops of water began to rattle downward like huge spheres of hail.

Jake Calkins wrapped a blanket around his lank form, but the driving tempest found its way through the dilapidated covering of the carriage in a score of places.

In a few minutes both the passengers were wet to the skin.

"It would have been better had we stayed at the inn," remarked Orson Oxx.

"Perhaps so, but I could not stand it to be so near Eva without hastening to her."

"Well, we must be half-way there, and we may as well go on as to turn back."

The storm was one of the most violent that had ever raged through the Jersey pines.

It would have been impossible to see a foot of the way, but for the crimson flashes of lightning which were incessant.

Some were so close that the tall, column-like pines at the side of the road were riven by the thunderbolts, which sent the splinters flying across the highway.

More than once the horses, spiritless as they naturally were, shied and stopped.

But Jake Calkins seemed unmoved by the terrible and sublime warring of the elements.

He yanked the lines, swung his whip, and scolded his nags for their timidity.

The rain descended in torrents, and gusts of wind which roared among the pines, almost overturned the carriage.

"It cannot last long," was the comforting conclusion of the two passengers.

Suddenly a starlike point gleamed through the momentary darkness, a short distance ahead and at the side of the road.

"That's Sam Turner's," was the welcome exclamation of the driver.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT SAM TURNER'S.

THE point of light shone through the Egyptian gloom for one instant, and then came a crash as if the heavens and earth were rent asunder.

The lightning had struck a huge pine at the side of the road, sending the splinters in a snow-storm across to the woods on the other side of the highway.

The smell of sulphur was in the air, and the terrific concussion fairly lifted the carriage from the ground.

Orson Oxx and Donald Marvin held their breath, for they were appalled by the awful display of the electric forces which seem at all times to be slumbering around us.

Even the immobile Jake Calkins started in his seat, as the blinding flash environed them with the intense flame.

His horses stopped of their own accord, and

he did not urge them to go forward, for he saw it was impossible.

The crackling trunk of the splintered pine had fallen directly across the road, and no team could pass either way until it should be removed.

"Jewhilakens!" he exclaimed as soon as he recovered his self-possession, "there's the end of that journey."

"But we are close to the house?"

"Yes, it's only a few steps to walk, though you'll get wet."

"We can't get any wetter than we now are," said Donald Marvin. "Come, let's be off."

"I'll trouble you for your fare, please."

"I beg pardon," said Orson Oxx, handing a one dollar bill to the frugal driver, who thanked him and immediately began backing and turning so as to face his team the other way.

He did this more expeditiously than would have been supposed.

The moment the reversal was effected, he lashed them into a trot, as though he had a special reason for getting away from the spot with all possible speed.

The young men looked back, and, by the flashing lightning's gleam, saw the rickety vehicle turning a curve in the road, and passing out of sight among the pines, which wall'd in the highway so closely on either hand, that the wonder was how two teams could meet and pass in the daytime.

Oxx and Marvin, however, had lost all interest in him, and hastened forward toward the "light in the window."

The lover trembled with excitement, as he felt he was on the eve of meeting his beloved, from whom he had been separated so long.

One had traveled thousands of miles since they last met.

"She will be amazed to receive such a call from me in this lonely out-of-the-way place."

Orson Oxx led the way, the two pausing now and then to await the flashes of lightning to show them the path.

Soon the gate was opened, they passed up a short walk, and the detective rapped sharply on the door.

His summons was instantly responded to by Mr. Samuel Turner himself, who was a hospitable man.

"Come right in," he called out, drawing the door wide open; "this is the worst storm—Heavens!"

He stepped back as another blinding crash shook earth and sky, and all felt the tremendous pulsation of the air.

The wife uttered a scream, and covered her face with her hands.

The two waited for no second invitation, but stepped into the cheery sitting-room, where a fire of wood was burning on the hearth.

Orson Oxx was first, and Donald, following somewhat timidly, looked anxiously around the apartment.

He saw no one but the man and wife.

"Oh, Heaven!" he thought; "can it be that another disappointment awaits us!"

He could scarcely restrain his impatience, but Orson Oxx had given him plainly to understand that he himself was conducting this campaign.

Almost immediately there was a perceptible diminution in the intensity of the storm.

The deluge of falling rain grew less, the thunder receded, and the lightning became more distant.

The hospitable farmer invited them to supper, but they had eaten all they wished, and thanked him.

He offered to furnish them with a change of clothing (necessarily of an ancient character), but they did not mind the moisture, and, drawing their chairs to the fire, began drying them by that means.

There is a wide-spread belief through that portion of New Jersey that the only safe way to dry a garment that has been wet, while on a person, is to keep it there until it loses its moisture.

Both the young men were in too vigorous health to care for such a trifle as being caught in a storm without protection.

Orson Oxx saw the feverish impatience of his companion, and therefore came to the point at once.

"You are surprised to see us here, Mr. Turner; but we have come to find the two young ladies who visited you yesterday."

"I do not understand you, sir."

The looks of Mr. Turner showed that he spoke the truth.

"Did not Mr. Jake Calkins bring a couple of young ladies, with a large trunk, to this place yesterday?"

Mr. Turner was more astonished than ever.

"No, sir; he did nothing of the kind."

"But he assured us that he did."

"Then he lied to you most wofully."

Neither Orson Oxx nor Donald Marvin were prepared to believe that their driver had deceived them in this wholesale fashion.

"I can hardly think so. What object could he have in telling us such an outlandish story?"

"Mybe he was aid to do it!"

Out of the mouths of babes sometimes come the words of wisdom.

With all the wonderful brilliancy which Orson Oxx possessed, he felt himself for the moment the inferior of this rough resident of the Jersey Pines.

Sam Turner, whether consciously or not, had struck the "key note!"

"He has spoken the truth," said Orson, quietly, turning toward Donald Marvin.

"Don't you believe Eva is here?" asked the astonished lover.

"She is not, and she has never been inside this house. Jake Calkins is the one who lied to us."

"Why should he do that?"

"Mr. Turner intimated the reason."

"He was paid to do it!"

"Undoubtedly."

"By whom?"

"Need I tell you?"

"Certainly, for I cannot imagine, unless it was Ward Hildreth, and he hasn't had the opportunity to do it."

"It was not he."

"Then this scallawag of a Calkins hasn't seen Eva?"

"Most certainly he has. He carried her and Cora and their luggage away from Farmingdale yesterday. That is clear from his own words."

"But he has proven himself a falsifier."

"Of course, but he could not have given the description of the two ladies as he did without any prompting from me, nor would he have thought of the large trunk unless he had actually seen it. Up to that point, he told the truth, but thence forward he was a regular Ananias."

"He must have taken the ladies somewhere."

"Of course; he knew who we were the moment we began our inquiries. I can recall now several suspicious actions on his part, but I never dreamed of treachery from him."

"Did he not hurry back after we left his carriage?"

"Of course he did, for he knew he was on dangerous ground. I would give a good deal to have him within reach for five minutes."

The Man of Iron spoke in a low voice, but there was a gleam in his clear gray eye which meant mischief whenever he should run across Mr. Jacob Calkins.

"It is plain," added Orson, "that Cora Hildreth has paid him to mislead us and he has done it most effectually."

"But we are in the neighborhood of Eva and shall be able to find her."

"We may to-morrow."

"I would like to start out to-night."

"It makes no difference what you want, you won't do any such thing; I am running this business."

The Man of Iron smiled, but he was in earnest.

They turned toward Mr. Turner, who had been moving about the place, and now came and sat down beside them.

There could be no doubt of his truthfulness, and he was anxious to give them all assistance he could.

He had known Jake Calkins since boyhood, and there could be no doubt that his reputation was fully deserved.

The whole area of eastern and southern New Jersey might be searched in vain for such a colossal falsifier as that individual.

Unfortunately Mr. Turner could give no information at all concerning the young ladies.

He had never seen nor heard a word about them.

"They are somewhere on this broad earth," muttered Donald Marvin, tossing uneasily on his bed, "and I shall never rest until I infold my idolized Eva to my heart."

And oh! fond waiting heart, shall that hour ever come?

CHAPTER XX.

ORSON OXX AND DONALD MARVIN PART COMPANY.

WHEN Orson Oxx, the detective, pronounced Cora Hildreth a woman of wonderful nerve and cunning he spoke the simple truth.

He felt that he was engaged, in a measure, in a conflict with her.

He had run counter to the gentle sex before, and he knew that it caused the severest mental strains of his life.

"The old gentleman is scheming for the property," said Orson, "and his Cora is doing her part by keeping Eva, the only obstacle, out of the way until the old villain shall win."

"She has learned through Swank or Wagsnaff, or she suspects, that I am on the side of the intended victim, and she has concluded to teach me a trick or two. I shouldn't wonder if she succeeds before the thing is through."

"I wish it were morning."

It would seem that, having traced the woman so readily to this portion of the country, and having narrowed the circle so much, the easiest part of his task lay before him.

And yet detective Orson Oxx felt that he was now brought face to face with the most difficult work of all.

Cora Hildreth, being fully aroused, was likely to display an ingenuity and fertility of resource approaching the marvelous.

More than likely, after coming to this out-of-the-way neighborhood, she would double on her trail and take refuge at some point many miles away.

By appealing to the affection of her cousin, so called, she could induce her to consent to many things which were repulsive to her pure, refined nature.

It must necessarily take Ward Hildreth several weeks to secure entire possession of the property of his deceased brother.

What could not be done in that time, where every day counted for so much?

Still, it occurred to the sagacious Orson Oxx that the villain might establish the death of his niece to the satisfaction of the authorities, and thus place his hand on the personal property with comparatively no delay at all.

Caleb Hildreth most likely had left a large portion of his wealth in the shape of bonds which represented a vast amount of cash.

Thus he might in the course of a day or two after his arrival in Philadelphia take enough money from the vaults of the Fidelity Trust Company to satisfy him.

Orson knew that he had only to present the letters testamentary from the Register of Wills in the Orphan's Court, under the proper seal to secure all this wealth.

His faithful pals, Swank and Wagsnaff would be certain to notify him of danger and such would be the course of the old mar, should he deem it unsafe to wait.

The simple, common-sense course, therefore, was for Orson Oxx to send a communication to the Register of Wills, begging him to delay the issue of the letters testamentary for a few days; inasmuch as there was good reason to doubt the death of Miss Eva Hildreth the sole legatee under the provisions of her dead father's will.

That excellent and estimable officer would not take such an important step until satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt that it was his duty to do so.

Accordingly, Orson Oxx, the next morning wrote a letter to the officer of the import already named.

"I think that will secure a delay, even if only a brief one," he said to himself, after sealing and directing it.

"I will mail it from Farmingdale myself to-day," was his decision, as he sealed and placed it in his pocket.

The morning was clear, sunshiny and warm.

The storm had cleared away in the night, leaving traces on every hand of its terrific violence.

Our friends insisted on paying Mr. Turner for his hospitality, but the gentleman would not hear of it, and begged that they would call again on the first occasion.

The two agreed to walk to Farmingdale, as the distance was not great.

"I have become convinced of one thing," said Orson Oxx, while making their way along the road strewn with the limbs and debris from the trees that had been shattered by the storm.

"What is that?"

"It is best for us to separate."

"Why so?"

"We can prosecute this search much better."

"How?"

"It will double the effective force, as you can see. You can take one route and I another; I think your experience of the last twenty-four hours has taught you a good deal."

"It has most certainly."

"Have you a pistol?"

"I never carried one."

"It is a bad practice as a rule, but the little implement is a handy thing sometimes to have about the house. As they say down in Arkansas, you may not want a pistol at all times, but, when you do, you want it most infernally bad."

Marvin accepted the weapon, though not without misgiving as to the propriety of doing so.

"You are a wonderfully powerful and active man," said he, "but one single pistol ball can make a complete wreck of such magnificence of muscle and skill."

"I know that; and I suppose that will be the end of me; I have had more than one narrow escape; the pitcher will go to the well once too often."

The matchless detective heaved a sigh, as though a shadowy fear were settling over him.

But he quickly rallied and talked with his old-time vim and sprightliness.

"I must say there is one person whom I am more anxious to meet just now than any one else."

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Jacob Calkins; I shall never feel that my mission on earth is accomplished until I have a settlement with him."

But a surprise awaited the two friends.

A short time after they reached the village of Farmingdale, where the detective made some careful inquiries for the country man who had played them such a scurvy trick the night before.

He learned that he had taken the early train to New York.

The information came in such a form that it could not be doubted.

"It is certain," said Orson Oxx to his young friend, "that Cora Hildreth has become aware of the danger, and she is playing her hand for all it is worth."

"What is to be done?"

"We must separate, as I said a moment ago."

"And what then?"

"Aim for the same target, but from different stand-points."

"What will you do? Start for New York?"

"Possibly not, for, if he is following the directions of that young woman, as I am sure he is, he will play some simple but very annoying tricks."

"What sort?"

"He undoubtedly bought a ticket for New York, as we have been informed, but more than likely he has left the train at some point this side, just as we did yesterday. In case such was his course, it will be a hard matter to trace him."

"Do you think he has done that?"

"I am inclined to believe he went directly to the city."

"Will you be able to find him?"

"Without trouble; he will recognize me, as I now appear, but I shall make some changes in my dress, which will close his optics in that direction."

"I would prefer to remain here."

"It is my wish that you do so; you suspect that the women are somewhere in this neighborhood?"

"I do, for, while we know they came here, we have no reason to believe they have gone away."

"We have no proof that they have done so, but I incline to think they are a good many miles off and the distance is increasing every minute."

"They might have driven to some other station and boarded the train, though. It does not seem probable."

"Well," said Orson Oxx, as the distant whistle of the approaching train was heard, "I will leave you to rely upon yourself and the favor of Heaven."

"How shall I communicate with you if it becomes necessary?"

"It cannot be done; I cannot give you any address; we are in the same box and each must climb out the best way he can."

"Then you go to New York?"

"I cannot tell; I may be back here before sunset."

"Suppose I have some message to leave for you?"

"Do it in the shape of the cipher I gave you yesterday. In the mean time, be very careful: you are maneuvering against two desperate men and one desperate woman; all are cunning and the chances are ten to one you will be outwitted."

With some other words of advice, Orson Oxx bade his friend good-by, and, a few minutes later was speeding toward the metropolis, behind the engine of the local train.

He had used some slight but justifiable deception toward Donald Marvin.

He did not expect to go to New York.

One reason was, he was confident that the two ladies for whom he was hunting were not there.

He did not believe Jake Calkins had gone thither.

But he was anxious to leave the impression that he had started for the metropolis, and consequently was not likely to be seen among the Pines again for a considerable time.

He more than suspected that spies were watching his movements while in this secluded section.

Besides he could not bunt well in company.

He wished to attack this problem untrammelled by the presence of any one.

His move, therefore, it will be understood was intended to place him on fighting-ground in his "war-paint and feathers."

That is, he intended to take up the task in a form and manner which would not handicap him in the least.

While sitting in the car, he quietly made some changes in his personal appearance, which would prevent his being recognized by any one whom he had encountered in Farmingdale.

It required some skill to do this, but he effected it.

There was more to do, but he could afford to defer that.

At Freehold, he left the cars and went down the main street.

His first proceeding was to dispatch his letter to the Register of Wills in Philadelphia, concluding that this town was preferable to Farmingdale for that purpose.

Then he entered a large store, where he purchased a flapping straw hat.

From another he procured a long linen duster and finally he completed his outfit.

He then tied his extra clothing in a red-cotton handkerchief, which he carried in his hand.

He had on a pair of cheap spectacles and sauntered toward the depot.

Just before he reached it, he came face to face with Jake Calkins.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SECLUDED HOME.

FROM what has been told, the readers have traced the course of Cora and Eva Hildreth for a considerable distance.

As we have intimated, they left New York, in the manner named, and with scarcely any interruption, proceeded straight to the village of Farmingdale, New Jersey.

They parted with Mr. Ward Hildreth at Monmouth Junction, which, as many know, is the station where the change is made by those who desire to leave the main line and go toward the sea-shore.

The cunning Cora Hildreth understood the situation very clearly.

She knew the exceedingly high stakes for which they were playing, and she was determined to win.

"My work," she reflected, "is to keep Eva out of the way for a few days or weeks. I'll do that even if I have to kill her."

There was a flash in the cold gray eyes, as she mastered this terrible resolution, such as might have lit up the baleful countenance of the Marquise de Brinvilliers, when she looked upon the appalling effects of her "Succession Powders."

Cora knew that Swank and Wagsnaff were hovering on the outer walls, so to speak, of this diabolical conspiracy, and would render all the help they could.

But she understood also that Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron, was supposed to be taking a hand in it.

She had never seen him to her knowledge, but she had heard wonderful stories of his skill and mighty strength.

The latter she dreaded less than his mental acumen, which it was stated was not less phenomenal.

Little did she dream that the handsome young man who was leaning against the mailbox on the lamp-post which stands at the junction of Broadway and Courtlandt street, was the identical detective whom she held in such dread.

The encounter between him and the two pickpockets had made known to the latter the identity of their terrific conqueror.

They gave the hint to Ward Hildreth, who in turn made it known to Cora.

"There is no doubt we shall have to outwit him in order to succeed," was the conclusion of this remarkable woman, as she left the cars at Farmingdale, accompanied by Eva Hildreth.

Had she been alone, the bad woman would have taken measures to hide her footprints from the moment she left New York.

But she was aware that could scarcely be done, when both wore deep mourning, and could be traced so easily.

At the point where they left the cars, her knowledge of character enabled her to select Jake Calkins as the one most likely to meet her requirements.

He proved a ductile tool indeed.

She passed him a liberal fee, and gave him to understand that she and her companion depended upon him to prevent any one else discovering where they were.

Eva Hildreth listened to the cunning plans arranged between the two while riding through the Pines, and her frank, truthful nature revolted.

She protested more than once, but Cora assured her that the safety of her uncle depended on what she termed this justifiable deception.

"It is only for a short time," said the conspirator; "only a day or two at the most."

Thereupon Eva bit her lips and held her peace.

Calkins first took the two ladies to his own house, where his wife, a vinegary, hard-working helpmeet, was the only one whom they encountered.

There they staid the remainder of the day and night, but the active brain of the conspirator led her to decide upon another change.

She was pleased to find Jake Calkins a reprobate after her own heart in business of this sort.

His wife was equally tractable when money was the motive power applied to her convictions.

Jake Calkins had an older brother living some three or more miles in the direction of Freehold.

He also possessed a keen-witted, sharp, unscrupulous wife, though her husband Mart was slow and heavy of movement and intellect.

But he was completely subjugated by his wife Peggy.

Money, in her case, never failed to make wrong appear right.

The next day, when Jake Calkins rode into Farmingdale, he was directed to stay there all day watching for any suspicious characters.

If any such appeared, Jake was to mislead them, and then hasten to give warning to Cora.

We have shown how well he performed his part of the contract.

Jake knew that more than one person had seen him leave the village with the trunk and two passengers.

Sam Turner had kept boarders on one or two occasions, though the attractions of his house, in the centre of the pine region, were being gradually overshadowed by those of the new seaside resorts rapidly opening along the coast.

When Jake rode into Farmingdale on the day succeeding the arrival of the ladies he carried a telegram directed to Ward Hildreth, Philadelphia, and to this effect:

"Work night and day. Lose not an hour or minute. We cannot remain here long."

This having been transmitted, Jake Calkins, in accordance with instructions, went back home and removed the ladies and their luggage to the home of Mr. Martin Calkins, a considerable distance away.

This was quite a task, and it consumed the better part of the day.

The afternoon was well gone when Jake drove into Farmingdale again, tied his horse, and waited and watched.

As directed, he inquired at the telegraph of-

fice, where a reply was received from the dispatch he had forwarded.

This he placed in his pocket, and then, in the most innocent manner imaginable, agreed to take Orson Oxx and Donald Marvin out to the house where he had taken the ladies the previous day.

While the storm was raging, he hastened back to his own home, and remained until next morning.

He ought to have seen Cora, who was anxiously expecting him, but the storm was too violent for him to attempt to drive such a distance at night.

On the morrow, however, he went to his brother's very early, before indeed any of the folks were up, excepting his brother.

Jake hurriedly made known the situation, and agreed on his plan of action.

The sealed telegram was given to Mart who promised to hand it to the ladies at breakfast time.

Immediately after meal time, Mart was to drive to Freehold, with the team of Jake.

Jake himself was to proceed to that point in the cars, where he would leave them, while Mart, who had some business to look after, would go on to New York, with the ticket which his brother would hand over to him.

Jake would drive his own team back to his brother's house, where he would hold a long interview with Miss Cora Hildreth.

This necessitated quite a long walk by Jake at the beginning, but he was able to tramp much further if necessary.

From what has been said, it will be seen that Jake Calkins projected quite an elaborate and lengthy scheme for the purpose of throwing his enemies off the scent.

"They'll be back in Farmingdale this morning looking for me," was his conclusion, "and I judge that'll be a healthy time for me to locate in some other latitude."

He was certainly wise in that respect.

Jake carried out his own programme as originally fixed in his mind.

When he reached Freehold, his brother was at the depot, awaiting him.

The ticket was passed over and Mart notified him he would find his team awaiting him at the hotel.

"Did you hand that lady her telegraph dispatch?"

"Great thunder!" exclaimed Mart; "I'll be darned if I ever thought about it!"

"Let me have it and I'll give it to her."

Mart began hurriedly searching for it, while the train was waiting, and finally said:

"Why it's in my other coat of course; Peggy'll give it to you—Thunderation ag'in."

Just then the engine whistled and Mart nearly dislocated his neck in getting into the car.

Jake had no hesitation in holding this interview with his brother on the platform of the station, because he knew that neither of the two men whom he feared was present.

A few minutes later Jake loured off to the principal hotel, where he spent more time than he should have done.

While on his way down the street, he met Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT BEFELL DONALD MARVIN.

IN the mean time Donald Marvin became absorbed in "business."

He was at a loss to perceive a suitable motive for the detective leaving him to go to New York.

"There is no reason to suspect any one has gone in that direction besides this awkward country hulk, Jake Calkins, and what has Orson Oxx to do with him?"

"There must be some other cause."

And just there Donald Marvin hit it.

But the lover could not hope to gain anything by sitting idly on the porch of the hotel while the hours slipped by.

And yet he did accomplish something very important, indeed.

A rough, honest-looking old fellow ensconced himself beside him, and seemed disposed to be sociable.

If ever there was an honest countenance, Marvin was satisfied this old fellow possessed it.

With no little skill the young lawyer cross-examined him on the matter which was close to his heart.

He knew Jake Calkins very well, and had known him for years.

Jake was a pretty good fellow, excepting he could outlie any man in Monmouth or Ocean counties.

Yes; he saw him drive out of Farmingdale the preceding day but one.

He had a large trunk and two ladies in his carriage.

There could be no doubt on that point.

But the old gentleman had not the remotest conception where he was taking them.

It was useless to ask Jake, for he couldn't help lying about it.

It was passing strange that he had admitted to Marvin that he had any passengers at all.

Our young friend had picked up some important information.

He was now firmly convinced that Jake Calkins had gone in the direction of Sam Turner's house, with Cora and Eva Hildreth.

He had either gone beyond, or he had taken some other course after leaving Farmingdale.

Clearly convinced on this point, he started back over the same route he and Orson Oxx had walked over that morning.

He was now alone, and was determined not to be caught napping.

"I have no doubt that Swank and Wagsnaff are somewhere in this neighborhood. It is more than likely they came last night, for perhaps they could have got here by the Southern, sooner than Oxx or I supposed."

A half-mile's walk among the pines, and Marvin reached the fork in the roads, which he recognized.

Examining the ground carefully, he fancied he detected the marks of Jake Calkins's wagon wheels, though the rain speedily obliterates such traces in the sandy soil.

"He lives in that direction," said Marvin to himself, "but it is not likely he has taken the ladies to his home. It will pay me to take a look, however."

He struck off with the energy of a man who feels he has important business on hand.

The day was quite warm, and the young lawyer, unaccustomed to the sandy soil of this section, and having already walked several miles, began to feel the effects of his labor.

Jake Calkins seemed to have an extended acquaintance, for the first team, met by Donald was driven by a man, who when appealed to, turned and pointed out the house, with his whip-stalk.

It was only a short distance away, and was approached by a devious lane leading from the main highway.

The pines at this point were so free from undergrowth that the building could be seen among the trees.

Between the point where Donald Marvin stood and the building in which he was so much interested, was a small tumble-down cabin.

It was not far from the main highway and was plainly seen from the road.

It was quite close to the lane leading to the home of Jake Calkins, and the young lawyer moved toward it.

"Probably some one lives there, who works for Calkins," was the thought of Marvin as he approached.

"He will be likely to know something about him."

"If he carried the two ladies to his home, this man must be aware of it."

These were the thoughts of Donald Marvin, while making his way toward the cabin.

The door was open, but his loud knocking brought no response.

Peering carefully beyond the door, he observed that the old structure had not been inhabited for some time.

The only furniture within, was a rude bench and a stool.

There was a perceptible and grateful coolness, as he stepped within and he stretched out on the bench for a little rest.

"This is pleasant," he muttered; "they say these countrymen will plow all day through the sand without getting tired, but will collapse in an hour on our pavements; I am sure the reverse of that is true, respecting city folks."

Donald Marvin had slept very little for the two preceding nights and he had scarcely assumed a lounging posture on the bench when he began to feel drowsy.

Before he fell asleep, he was dimly conscious of footsteps on the outside, and he fancied he caught a glimpse of some one as he carefully peeped through the door.

But the wearied lover was too far gone, to

feel any misgiving over what might have alarmed him at any other time.

In a few minutes, his head sunk lower and he became unconscious.

His senses had scarcely departed, when the man who had looked through the door, moved to the rear of the building, and, with the utmost caution, peered through the tumble-down window.

One look seemed enough, when he turned his head and made a signal with his right hand.

In response a second individual walked forth from among the trees and approached.

These two men were Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff.

"He's sleeping as snug as a bug in a rug," said Swank, who was the one that had peeped through the door and window.

"Pretty tired isn't he?"

"Seems to be."

"Likely to sleep for an hour or more?"

"Likely to sleep a *good deal longer I think.*"

There was a significance in the tone and manner which made the fearful meaning of these words clear.

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Pity he wasn't here too."

"Who?"

"That infernal Man of Iron."

"Pity indeed."

"We've thrown him off the track altogether."

"Gone to New York, hasn't he?"

"Perhaps."

"But let's get to work."

The suggestion was acted on at once.

The two began carefully gathering fuel.

There was plenty of material around them in the shape of dry pine twigs, bark and burrs.

These were carefully piled under the two windows which were very narrow.

Then it was found possible to fasten the dilapidated door, so it would be very hard to open from the inside.

When everything was secure, the demons contemplated their work with fiendish delight.

The approach of a wagon caused them to skulk to cover for several minutes.

As soon as the sound of the wheels died out, they hurried forth again.

No human eye was watching their frightful proceedings.

"Everything is ready," whispered Swank.

"Go ahead then," whispered his companion in reply.

And then the match was applied.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TWO PLOTTERS.

THE telegram from Cora to Ward Hildreth reached him without delay, and caused a decided change in his plans.

He saw that it was utterly out of the question to keep Eva hidden during the time needed to dispose of the real estate left by Mr. Caleb Hildreth, his brother.

At the very least a fortnight would be required, even with lawyer Galnaith doing his utmost to expedite matters.

Furthermore, the sly old counselor assured his new client that most of the wealth was of a personal nature.

Beyond a doubt the box, which was in the vaults of the Trust Company, contained a handsome fortune.

In laying his sacrilegious hands on this, there need be very little if any delay encountered.

Lawyer Galnaith was not acquainted with the change of plan by Ward Hildreth, as indeed there was no necessity of his knowing it.

But, all the same, the shrewd rascal suspected what was in the wind.

On the night succeeding the reception of the message from Cora, Ward was locked in the office of Gaffney G. Galnaith.

"As I told you yesterday," said the old fellow, peering over his spectacles, "the utmost haste cannot obviate the necessity of some delay in settling up the real estate."

"I understand that perfectly. The greater part, I believe, is in the shape of personal estate."

"I am satisfied that fully three-fourths is of that character."

The wicked executor could not conceal his delight from the penetrating eyes of the lawyer.

"You see," added the latter, "as your estimable brother grew older he formed a dislike for business, and sought relief from the cares

and anxieties which accompany it. For two or three years I assisted him in turning his property mostly into the shape of Government bonds."

"The interest on them is not large."

"True, but the lower the interest the better the security; and you know," added the lawyer, with another capacious smile which revealed his snaggy teeth, "your esteemed brother had enough property to invest in that form, and bring him an income more than sufficient for all the wants of himself and his amiable daughter."

"I see," responded the other villain, trying to swallow his exuberant feelings.

"I delivered the will to the Register to-day, without awaiting his citation, and of course it will be admitted to probate."

"Was it proven?"

"I neglected no step," replied the wily fox, with another huge grin; "it is always my rule to protect the interests of my clients, and you can depend upon my doing so in this case."

"I have not the least doubt of that, and you may depend also that I am not the man to forget such loyal service."

"I recognize a gentleman when I meet him."

Each party understood the hypocrisy of the other in this little exchange of "taffy."

"The question now is as to what steps must be taken to satisfy the Register that everything is *en regle*," said Ward Hildreth, fidgeting in his seat.

"You must procure the affidavits of witnesses who saw the suicide of the daughter."

"I have a couple."

"Let me see them."

Mr. Hildreth drew from the breast pocket of his coat, a properly drawn affidavit, taken before a notary public, in which the two signers set forth that they were acquainted with Miss Eva Hildreth, daughter of Caleb Hildreth, deceased, and that they were on the ferry-boat New Brunswick, on the night of August 11, 18—, when it was moving from Courtlandt street, New York, to Jersey City; that they saw the deceased leap overboard; that the ferry-boat was immediately stopped, and every effort made to rescue the unfortunate young lady, but that it failed.

"Is that sufficient?" asked Ward Hildreth, trembling with excitement.

"It ought to be, but the Register is very cautious, and I think he will ask more. This is signed, I observe, by Luffton Swank and Henry Wagsnaff. It would be well if you could secure one or two others. Can you do so?"

"Possibly I may, but no one else on the boat was acquainted with my niece."

"Some of the employes would testify to the suicide itself."

"Of course, but not to the identity of the lady."

"Again, there is a very serious matter; the body has not been recovered."

"I am afraid it will not be."

The villains looked in each other's face. They did not utter a word for a whole minute.

Each was trying to read the other's thoughts.

Both were unusually sly and cunning, and they succeeded to a large extent in divining the imaginings of the other's brain.

"I am well acquainted with the Register," said the lawyer; "I have brought him much custom and he is accommodating."

"What can you do with him?"

"Almost anything that is right."

"Secure the letters testamentary to-morrow, and you shall have your full fee of five thousand dollars."

"I will do my very best, you may depend, for I am anxious to protect your interests."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Call at this office to-morrow afternoon, or as soon as you return from New York."

"From New York? I did not intend to go there."

"You had better go over on the early train."

"For what purpose?"

"To work up what testimony you can."

"You mean respecting the death of my niece?"

"Precisely; it will not take you long to secure some additional evidence."

"I presume not; but is it absolutely necessary?"

"Possibly not, but the Register may demand it, and it is best to be fortified at all points."

"Will you try him as it stands?"

"Most assuredly, and I will use all the skill

I am master of to induce him to issue the letters testamentary, which, once placed in your hands, will give you command of all the personal property left by your excellent brother."

"Do you anticipate a refusal on his part?"

"I have fears of it; he is extremely careful, as he is obliged to be in such matters."

"Would a liberal fee help matters in that direction?"

Lawyer Galnaith shook his head.

"It would ruin our case completely; it would rouse suspicion on his part at once, and we would have an infernal time before he would help us out. It would be just like him to refuse to issue the letters until the body is produced."

"He must be a queer customer."

"In that respect he is. You may depend upon me to do everything that is possible to be done. Go to New York to-morrow morning and get back as soon as you can. Come straight to my office and let me know how you have succeeded."

"And by that time you may have something interesting to tell me."

"Most likely I shall."

A few minutes after, Ward Hildreth left the office of the scheming lawyer, and in the morning, in accordance with his promise, started for the metropolis.

Everything seemed to be working promisingly and the villain was in high expectation.

But neither he nor lawyer Galnaith dreamed what a day was to bring forth.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROTARY HASTINGS.

DONALD MARVIN was sleeping soundly, when he was suddenly awakened by a feeling of suffocation.

He had lain down in the cabin by the wayside for a brief rest, and awoke to find himself enveloped in such dense smoke, that he was obliged to gasp for breath.

His senses came to him on the instant, and he leaped up with a shout of terror.

The cabin was one mass of fire, above, around and on every hand.

Instinctively he sprung for the door through which he had entered a brief while before.

When he attempted to pull it inward it resisted his utmost efforts.

He struggled desperately, but it scarcely yielded.

Strangling and terrified, he dashed for one window after another.

There were only two, and each was too narrow for his body, and he was fastened as securely within as though he had been chained in the rock-bound prison of Chillon.

He realized on the instant that some one had done this, and his instinct told him it must have been the conspirators.

His situation was of the most appalling nature.

He shouted and shrieked like a madman, dashing hither and thither across the narrow space, clutching the sides of the windows with the strength of desperation.

All in vain.

Then feeling that the door was the most vulnerable point, he concentrated his energies on that.

Despair began to take possession of his soul, for the fire burned with frightful rapidity.

The cabin was as combustible as if made of timber; the heat was terrible.

"My God! must I die this awful death?" he wailed, recoiling from a serpent of flame which seemed to be hissing at his face in mockery.

At that supreme moment he heard several tremendous thumps upon the door, as though a battering-ram was directed against it.

They became more terrific, until the whole structure trembled beneath the shock.

Suddenly the door shot inward, burst from its fastenings as though stricken by the solid shot from a columbiad.

Donald Marvin struggled for the opening through which the smoke and flame were pouring, but he was too much exhausted, and sunk swooning to the floor.

But his time had not yet come.

A huge form dashed into the swirl of smoke and flame, caught him up from the floor, and bounded out again into the open air.

Now that he had a chance to gain a breath of the revivifying air, the young man speedily revived.

As he opened his eyes he saw a huge negro standing over him.

His dusky face was tortured by anxiety, and the looks which he bent on the poor, rescued youth showed that he was an honest, kind-hearted fellow.

"De gracious gorry Heben, masser! but I t'ought it was de last of you," said the African, with a great sigh of relief.

Marvin rose to the sitting position and leaned against a tree.

"It was you who saved me," said he, faintly, casting a grateful look upon his sable friend. "How did you know I was in there?"

"I war gwine 'long de road, when I see'd de smoke. I used to lib in dis house, so I war interested. I wondered how it got afire. When I see'd de brush an' sticks piled up ag'in' de winders I knowed dat some one had sot it afire. De house warn't ob much 'count, which am why me an' Dinah an' de childer moved out."

"Whom does it belong to?"

"Jake Calkins, who libs up beyont in dat house. I guess he am gonod away," said the African, looking in that direction, "or he would be down yar to l'arn 'bout it. He'll be mighty mad, for he am de stingiest man in dese parts."

"But you haven't told me how you came to rescue me."

"Why, I war standin' off dar lookin' on, when I heerd a yell from some one inside. I t'ought it war a dog, but I l'arned berry quick dat it war a pusson. You'd better belebe I moved quick den."

"I heard the blows against the door, but thought they were too late."

"Dem's what done it?"

The negro looked down at his boots, which were of enormous proportions.

"Number sebenteens. Made in Freehold on a last dat I bewed out for myself. Cakerlate I kin stave in de side ob any house wid 'em when I puts full steam on."

Donald Marvin rapidly recovered, and with slight assistance from his friend rose to his feet.

"Tell me your name, please."

"Rotary Hastings."

"Well, Rotary, under Heaven you have saved my life. I must insist that you accept a little testimonial."

"Oh, boss, I can't do dat!"

Even while the negro uttered the protest he fixed his big eyes wistfully on the pocketbook which Donald had drawn forth.

"How many children have you, Rotary?"

"Thirteen; but," he added, with a sigh, "we's had bad luck."

"How is that?"

"We lost seben afore dey had a chance to grow up."

"That was too bad. But here is a little something for the benefit of the little ones, not forgetting yourself and wife."

As the reader well knows, Donald Marvin was a poor man, who could ill afford anything in the way of luxury, but he had a heart, and never did a thing with more pleasure than he landed twenty dollars to the honest African who had rescued him from a most dreadful death.

By this time, Donald was pretty well himself again. Most providentially he had not been harmed, though his lungs smarted and pained from the smoke he had inhaled.

The fire was, in fact, of little account and the ascending vapor was most likely supposed to be caused by one of the small conflagrations which occur every summer in the Pines.

It had not attracted the attention even of Mrs. Calkins, whose house was but a short distance away.

No one was seen approaching from any direction.

"Rotary," said Donald, "when I went in there and lay down the door was not entirely closed."

"Dat's so; some onprincipled swindler hab done it. Ef I knowed who I'd pitched him in dar among de fire, but he'll coteh enough fire in de last day, when de Lord calls him to account."

"No doubt of that; did you see any one before you caught sight of the burning cabin?"

"No one at al," replied Rotary Hastings, adding after a pause, "all dat I see'd war a couple ob cows down by de road; don't tink dey done'd it."

He grinned hugely at his own humor and Donald could not help smiling in sympathy.

The African seemed so happy over the unexpected wealth which had been placed in his

hands, that he carefully stowed it away in his tobacco box and made as if to go.

Young Marvin bade him a pleasant good-day, repeating his thanks, when he recalled that Orson Oxx had said to him that very frequently the most useful information of the detective frequently comes to him through accident.

And that, furthermore, every possible source of information, however insignificant, must be seized upon.

"Hold on, Rotary!" he called. "You say Jake Calkins lives up yonder in that house?"

"Yes, sah, he does."

"When have you been there last?"

"I went dar airly dis mornin' to get my wages, but Mrs. Calkins said dat Jake had gonod to New York and I would hab to wait till he comed back; I forgot dat when I spoke awhile ago 'bout his not being at home."

"Have they any strangers at the house?"

"No, but dey did hab."

"Who were they?"

"A couple ob ladies, but dey am gone."

"How do you know that?"

"I seen Jake take 'em away yesterday."

"Do you know where he took them?"

"I aint suab, but I tink he took 'em to his brother Mart, who libs toward Freehold. Leastways he wen't dat way and dey are cronies; would you like to go dar?"

"I would, indeed."

"All right; come 'long; I'll shew you de way."

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE AWAKENING.

CORA HILDRETH and her cousin Eva were sitting in the humble apartment, assigned to their use, in the home of Mart Calkins, in the "Pines," between the village of Farmingdale and the town of Freehold.

The room was up stairs, and though it had abominably low ceilings, small windows, rag carpets and the plainest and most old-fashioned kind of furniture, yet it was scrupulously clean and quite comfortable.

"I can well understand why no one would dream of our being here," said Eva with a smile, after surveying the room.

"What is the reason?" asked Cora, as the two sat facing each other by the window, across which a piece of blue netting had been stretched to keep out the mosquitoes.

"It is the last place in the world that would be selected as a summer resort; but how long do you think we shall have to stay here, Cora?"

"Not more than three or four days; you have asked that question a good many times, my cousin."

"I may as well confess to you that my situation is anything but pleasant."

"I have no doubt of that."

"I cannot understand why uncle Ward can go direct to Philadelphia, while we two, who had nothing at all to do with his trouble, are forced into hiding among the pine barrens of New Jersey. Now, if the situations were reversed, it would seem more in accordance with common sense and reason."

"I know that there were many things that your father saw in his brother which bore a curious look, but your father held him in such loving friendship that he did that which was for the best, without calling in question the motives of my parent."

This was the most vulnerable point in Eva's armor, as Cora well knew.

The memory of her father was held in such reverential remembrance by the daughter that she allowed it to sway her judgment.

Had it been otherwise, she never would have consented to make this journey, which was so much like a criminal fleeing from justice, that her soul rebelled again and again.

"You know," said Eva, her heart touched, "that there is no sacrifice I would not make for you and your father."

"I have heard you say that a number of times, and yet you seem to regret a very trifling sacrifice, from the continual manner in which you harp on it."

"That is only because we are doing that which seems unreasonable. If I can be made to see that it is necessary and proper, I shall not complain."

"You ought to know that father would not ask it unless there was good reason for doing so. Should he be arrested, he will send for us at once."

"Is he not in much greater danger in Phila-

delphia than we are in this out-of-the-way region!"

"I have been told that there is no hiding-place so secure as in a great city."

"Then we should have gone there."

"We will, shortly. You can understand why it is you and I are in much greater danger of being discovered than father."

"Possibly so; but it is a very strange situation in which I find myself—hiding from the eye of the officers of the law, which I never have violated in the slightest respect."

Cora made no answer to this protest, for it would have been rather hard to do so.

She understood Eva much better than the latter suspected.

At such times it was better to keep silent, and act as though her feelings had been wounded.

Without a word, therefore, Cora, after rocking back and forth several minutes, sprung up, donned her hat and went down-stairs, as if she intended take a short walk alone.

Eva sat by the window, sorely troubled.

"I hardly know what to make of this," she thought. "I love Cora and uncle; I would be happy in doing all I could for them; but this business is wrong, and I cannot consent to be a party to it much longer."

"If it is unsafe for us to stay in New York or Philadelphia, it is certainly tenfold more unsafe for him, the one who has broken the law, to show himself there in the broad daylight."

"It may be that he has friends," she added, after a moment's thought, "who will take good care of him, and it may be that if the officers are anxious to secure him, they will hunt us up, in the natural belief that we are in communication with him; but it all seems very improbable—"

Just then a foot was heard on the stairs, which the fair Eva identified.

It was too heavy for Cora.

"I was hanging up Mart's coat," said the strong-minded woman, "when this ere envelop fell out of the pocket. I can't read very well without my spec's; but it's for you, I believe."

Eva saw that it was a telegram, and, with a beating heart, and without any suspicion that she was doing wrong, she opened the envelope to read its contents.

She observed, while doing so, that the yellow wrapper was stuck together so hastily that it parted without tearing the paper.

This was the dispatch which the astounded Eva read:

"PHILADELPHIA, August 13th. —"

"MISS CORA HILDRETH:—Keep her out of sight for a few days. You can easily do it. The swag is heavy here; am bound to win, if you play your hand right. You and I will be fixed for the rest of our lives. Much depends on you. W. H."

Eva Hildreth read every word of this amazing message, and a suspicion of the truth flashed upon her with the vivid suddenness of the lightning-stroke.

She carefully placed the single-folded sheet back in the envelope, and, observing that some gum remained, resealed it, holding it in her hand until it was dry.

"Mrs. Calkins, that message was not intended for me; will you please hand it to Miss Cora when she returns?"

"Of course I will."

"And will you do me the favor not to let her know that I have seen it?"

"Of course, for I don't like her."

Eva was not the lady to encourage gossip by one who was her inferior, but the new light which had broken in upon her, was so extraordinary and so dazzling, that she unhesitatingly asked her:

"Why don't you like her?"

"Because I don't."

"That's no reason; have you any cause?"

"I have plenty."

"What are they?"

"I don't like her goings on."

"Her goings on!" repeated the astonished Eva, "what can you mean?"

The woman looked at her significantly:

"And don't you know, Miss Eva?"

"Don't I know? Most certainly I haven't the remotest idea of what you refer to."

"Why, she is with a strange man now."

Eva Hildreth's eyes dilated with horror.

"Are you telling the truth?"

"If you will come with me I will show you."

"Where is she?"

"Come with me and I will show you."

Eva had risen to her feet in her excitement, but she shook her head.

"No, I will not play the spy on any one; I will not go to watch my cousin."

"You needn't go out the house; just come to the front room."

With her senses swimming, Eva Hildreth followed the bustling woman, who conceived it her duty to make herself as thoroughly acquainted as possible with the private affairs of her guests.

Arrived at the front window, they stood back somewhat, so as not to be seen.

"There she is!"

The lady of the house pointed in the direction of the highway, perhaps two hundred yards distant.

The pine trees were on both sides the lane as well as along the main road.

About half-way between the house and the main road stood a woman in conversation with a man.

They were nigh enough for it to be seen that both were gesticulating as though very earnest over something.

"My stars and garters!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Calkins, "if there ain't another man."

Such was the fact indeed; a second person was standing a short distance to the right and further in the wood.

He was whittling a stick and evidently waiting for the other two to finish their interview.

Eva watched from a distance for a minute or two, and then went back to her room, thanking Mrs. Calkins and begging her to give no hint to Cora of what had been said and what had been seen.

The whole nature of the girl was aroused, for, within the last few minutes the entire truth had burst upon her, coming with the overwhelming force of an avalanche.

"It is a most wicked plot," she said, compressing her lips and clinching her hands. "It is a deep-laid plan to get all my inheritance away from me; uncle Ward is a bad man and Cora is no better; they have formed the scheme between them; they have got up some story so as to keep me here with her until he is able to secure what money there is of mine in Philadelphia."

It will be seen that in the main the girl had hit the truth.

She could not be expected to understand the precise means by which the villainy was to be consummated, but her womanly impulse told her its nature.

"They have played upon my affection to secure my consent to this most disagreeable proceeding on my part. Cora, with all her cunning, cannot answer my questions nor give me a valid reason for what we have done."

"But she is determined I shall stay here until her father can get the money that does not belong to him."

"These men whom she has met secretly are conspirators in the same plot."

"They have met to talk over their plans and to laugh at the foolish fly that has been caught by the spider."

"But the fly has had its eyes opened—"

She stopped with a gasp and a flash of the eyes.

"I see it all; my uncle never sent that telegram to Donald when we reached New York; he has not forwarded my letters and more than likely he has kept some of those which Donald has sent me. He is a bad, very bad man."

There were several matters which gave the aroused Eva Hildreth considerable hope.

She was in the United States of America and in a law-abiding State. She was her own mistress and could leave this house, whenever she chose to walk forth.

Convinced that it was her duty to do so, she would depart as soon as she could make her preparations.

She had scarcely reached this conclusion when Cora came tripping up-stairs, her face flushed with excitement, while she seemed running over with good spirits.

"I have a telegram from father," said the imitator of Jake Calkins; "and he tells me that everything is promising; the man whom he punished so severely is not dead, but there is hope of his getting well. If he does pick up, then father will be out of danger."

"How long before uncle Ward will know the truth?"

"Within two or three days."

"Well, Cora, I have concluded to start for Philadelphia this day."

Eva spoke calmly, but the fire came into the eyes of the evil woman on the instant.

Drawing her breath in quickly, she demanded:

"WHAT?"

"I have made up my mind to go out this house to-day and—"

Cora sprung up like a tigress. The appalled Eva saw her fumble excitedly at the bosom of her dress for a moment, and then, to her horror, she drew forth a small, glittering dagger.

Raising this aloft, while her whole figure flamed with passion, she exclaimed:

"If you attempt to leave before me, I will kill you—yes I will kill you!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

FACE TO FACE.

At last Cora Hildreth threw off the mask which had concealed so long her true nature.

When the beautiful and attractive Eva announced her purpose of starting for her home in Philadelphia on that very day, and Cora saw the danger of losing the great prize which was almost within her grasp, her passion overwhelmed her.

For the moment she was a flaming fury. The baleful light which glowed from her eyes was the fire of lunacy.

Holding the small, needle-like dagger over Eva, she repeated between her closed teeth:

"Yes, I will kill you—do you hear?—I will kill you!"

She was debating hotly in her own mind whether she ought not to slay Eva on the spot and at once.

She was in that raging fury that the dagger was clinched, the hand poised for the blow, and only a breath was needed to fan the raging fire into consuming, murderous hate.

And Eva Hildreth knew it all.

No one could have comprehended the situation more vividly than did she.

And what did she do?

She leaned back in her chair, and looked quietly up in the face of the tigress.

Their eyes met, the one blazing with fury, the other tremulous, gentle, reproachful.

Never was more sublime courage shown than by Eva Hildreth, who saw herself threatened by a lunatic with a drawn weapon.

Had she also flamed up, had she screamed and started to flee, had she returned reproaches; had she told what she knew; had she done anything except precisely what she did do, she would have been slain almost with the suddenness of the lightning-stroke.

For a few seconds the two confronted each other, each as motionless as a statue.

It was Eva who first spoke:

"Calm yourself, dear Cora; what has happened to shatter your nerves in that fashion?"

The evil woman held her posture a moment longer. Then she trembled violently, wavered and dropped back in her chair, as if in a dead faint.

Eva caught her in her arms, and snatching up a fan, began using it with great vigor.

Cora turned her head aside, closed her eyes, muttered something unintelligible, and then appeared to swoon dead away.

Laying her head gently back, Eva snatched up some water and sprinkled it over her face.

"Come, dear Cora, rouse yourself; poor girl! what could have agitated her so dreadfully?"

The sagacious Eva Hildreth had had her eyes opened fully by the astounding knowledge which came to her while Cora was absent from the room, and she was not deceived by this pretended faint.

She saw that the young woman was no more unconscious than herself. Her bright color remained in her face, so the swoon could not be imitated perfectly.

But having measured the height and depth of her cousin's treacherous nature, Eva felt it necessary to use deception in dealing with her.

She therefore accepted the swoon as genuine.

By and by Cora began breathing short and fast. She opened her eyes and looked about her with a faint wildness.

"Eva—where—am—I?" she muttered in a weak, bewildered way.

"You are all right, Cora; you are with me, Eva; don't be alarmed."

After the lapse of the proper time, the cunning woman revived, and made some further inquiries as to her precise location, and as to how she came to be there.

Eva answered all these inquiries with the simplicity of a child. After a while the

treacherous woman seemed to grasp the situation.

"I beg your forgiveness," said she, picking up the dagger from where her cousin had laid it on the stand at her elbow, "for I remember it all now. Oh, Eva! I threatened you with that dreadful thing, did I not?"

And covering her hands, she broke into tears, her whole frame quivering with emotion.

"So you did, but never mind, never mind," replied Eva, placing her arm affectionately around her.

This peculiar billing and cooing went on for some minutes, when Cora appeared to become more reconciled to the situation.

"I cannot understand what should have seized me to make such a dreadful threat," said she, with every appearance of horror over the remembrance of what she had done; "but I can partly understand it."

"What was the cause, dear Cora?"

"When I went out, feeling hurt by what you had said, I saw a man who had a letter, as it seemed to be, in his hand. When we met, he said he was searching for me, and handed me what proved to be a telegram. I was dreadfully excited, for I was looking for nothing of the kind."

"Whom was the dispatch from?" asked Eva, showing by her apparent excitement that she could also counterfeit successfully.

"From dear father, and what do you suppose it was?"

"I am sure I have no idea."

"Those officers have followed him to Philadelphia; he is in great danger of capture; he has been obliged to flee, and does not know how long he can escape."

"Why doesn't he come here?"

"Perhaps he may; he spoke of doing so in his telegram, and wished us to wait two or three days, until he could decide what is best to do. I was dreadfully shocked by the news, and then, when you told me you were going away, I felt awful. It seemed for the moment as though you had joined his enemies, and meant to betray him. Everything swam before my eyes, and I have only a dim recollection of what I said and did. You will forgive me, dear Eva, will you not?"

The pathetic yearning of this inquiry would have melted the heart of the most unfeeling.

Eva Hildreth could not have resisted it for a moment had she not known the truth.

"There, there, think no more about it," replied our heroine, avoiding a direct answer to the prayer of the other; "such news as you speak of is enough to overcome any one."

"Thank you for your consideration; I am very grateful, indeed."

Had Eva chosen to do so, she might have asked some very troublesome questions of Cora.

For instance, she might have wanted to know how it was the messenger with the telegram knew where to deliver it.

She might have asked to look at it, besides several other things, all of which would have puzzled the evil woman to answer satisfactorily.

But Eva knew too well the conscienceless character of the woman with whom she had to deal, and she did not hesitate to employ all the *finesse* at her command.

"I was too hasty," she said, after her cousin had become quiet and they had discussed the matter; "I promise you to say no more about it, nor to ask any further questions."

"Thank you, thank you, dear cousin; I cannot tell you how grateful I am."

All the same, Eva meant to keep her word.

She intended to make no further reference to the subject which had caused so much trouble between them.

She had a very good reason for this course, inasmuch as nothing could be gained by it.

And all the same again, she had determined to leave that place that very day, never to return to it again.

Inasmuch as she was absolute mistress of her own actions, it would seem that she had nothing to do except to go.

No one had the right to say her nay.

But an angry and desperate woman is not amenable to reason.

That single moment in which Cora stood over her with uplifted weapon gave a vivid idea of the terrible possibilities which lay beyond.

Eva reasoned that there was no necessity for her immediate departure, though it was hard to restrain the yearnings to hasten to the arms of her beloved Donald.

It ought to be easy to deceive Cora into the belief that no thought of departure was entertained. Then, when Eva should reach Farmingdale, her cousin would not dare interfere.

She would be powerless to do anything, no matter how infuriated she might become.

All that Eva had to do, therefore, as she viewed the matter, was to deceive Cora until she could gain an opportunity to leave the house of Mart Calkins.

A brief start secured, and the woman would not undertake a pursuit and rescue, which must end in a ridiculous *fiasco*.

The day was a sultry one in August, and as the two sat by the window, in the stuffy room on the second floor, a feeling of drowsiness came over the young ladies.

Eva's head drooped several times and Cora was scarcely less affected.

"I cannot keep awake any longer," finally exclaimed the latter laying her head on the bed beside her, and almost immediately closing her eyes.

"I don't wish to sleep," said Eva, "and will go down-stairs and help Mrs. Calkins."

Cora made no objection and Eva went out of the room, catching up her hat as she did so.

When she reached the lower floor, she saw from the manner of Mrs. Calkins that she had been listening, but Eva made no reference to it.

"You will be careful," said Eva, in a guarded voice, "not to give my cousin the least knowledge of what we were talking about while she was out."

"Never fear for me; I can lie like the mischief, when my duty demands it."

"I do not think our duty ever calls on us to do anything of the kind, but you can readily avoid telling her anything as she is not likely to suspect it. I must get away as soon as possible."

"I'm sorry to lose you, but I don't think it's safe for you to stay here. She looked like a crazy person to me; she'll kill you one of these days, if you do not leave."

"I wish to go as soon as possible; it's now near noon; there is no risk in my walking to Farmingdale or Freehold, is there?"

"It's awful hot and the sandy roads will try you dreadfully."

"I don't mind that."

"But how will you get your trunk? You know Mart is gone away."

"I will leave the trunk; I will take nothing but what I have on; the weather is so warm that I am not likely to suffer from exposure."

"Then what is to prevent your starting at once?"

"Nothing, so far as I can see, but I'm afraid she may awake, before I get away from the house."

"I'll see about that."

The woman hurried up-stairs and into the room where Cora sat with her head lying on the bed.

She made as much bustle as she could, overturning a couple of chairs in her enthusiasm; but they produced no perceptible effect on the sleeper.

"Humph!" muttered Mrs. Calkins as she returned, "you needn't have any fears about her; she'll sleep if the thunder comes as loud as it did last night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOM TUMBRELL OF BARNEGAT.

WHEN Orson Oxx and Jake Calkins met in the town of Freehold, the former looked exactly like an innocent old farmer.

Viewed from the rear, his flapping straw hat seemed to have been plastered flat against his shoulders, where it stuck without resting on his head.

His linen coat reached almost to his heels and the gentle breeze kept it fluttering like the ensign of his country.

He turned his toes in when he walked and allowed his under jaw to hang down like a fellow who had not seen so many houses in a long time.

"Hallo, Jake!" said farmer Tumbrell, as he called himself, "I'm mighty glad to see you, darned if I ain't!"

The farmer extended his hand very cordially and the wondering Jake took it rather gingerly, scanning the honest countenance in a puzzled way.

"You seem to have the advantage over me; I can't say that I remember you."

"Ain't your name Jake Calkins?" asked

farmer Tumbrell, stepping back and scrutinizing him.

By this time, several of Jake's friends had stopped and stood smiling at the old fellow, who seemed to be double what his age really was, and who looked as innocent as Joshua Whitcomb.

"Yes, sir; that's my name," replied Calkins, with a rather pompous air; "but you are a stranger to me."

"I'm Tom Tumbrell, from Barnegat."

"Never heard of you," replied Jake, buttoning his coat; "can't say from the cut of your jib that I care to know you; if you want to borrow any money, I ain't your man; pass on."

By this time a dozen were standing near, much amused with the verdancy of Tom Tumbrell.

"I've heerd of you down to Barnegat; everybody down there knows you; I'm on my way to Farmingdale on purpose to see you."

"What do you want to see me for?"

"Ole Josiah Miggles at Barnegat is said to be the ugliest looking and the onerest cuss ever knowed there; we're proud of Josiah but we've heerd a good many times that Jake Calkins was a thunderin' sight meaner and uglier in the face and the biggest liar that was ever raised among the Pines. We've heerd so much about him that a town meetin' was called and I was 'pinted to go and find out. Some wicked incendiary picked my pocket on the cars and I sorter got off the right road. I've been ridin' all 'round the kentry afore I fetched up at Freehold and I find now that I'm a good ways from Farmingdale; but maybe I won't have to go there now that I've seen you."

At this there was a general smile among the crowd and Jake turned very red in the face.

Manifestly the joke was a little too pointed to please him.

"How did you know it was me when you met me?"

"Nateral enough; I was watching for the ugliest and meanest-looking chap in creation and the minute I sot eyes on you I knowed you was the man!"

A general roar followed this reply.

Jake Calkins turned more crimson than before, while the old gentleman beamed upon him like a May morning.

"Is it so, Jake, that you're the biggest liar along the shore, and that you never paid a debt, and are so mean that you would cheat your own mother if you got the chance? If you are, give me your hand, for you kin lay over Josiah Miggles, who draws the line right there."

"Yes, that's the sort of fellow Jake is," called one of the bystanders. "You've hit it exactly."

"See here," said Calkins, bristling up to the old man, "the best thing you can do is to get back to Barnegat as quick as you know how. This place ain't good enough for you."

"I ain't in any hurry. I want to go home with you, so as to get better 'quainted. I ain't ready yet to make the report to the folks at Barnegat."

The bystanders were laughing merrily over this amusing interview. Some of them tried to guy the old fellow, but he paid no attention to them, and kept his spectacles turned toward Jake Calkins, who was boiling over with anger.

The sidewalk was pretty well filled, so that when a pedestrian came along the crowd had to make way for him.

But such a person, after walking a short distance, generally turned back and joined the group (unless it was a woman), so the two principal parties were pretty well surrounded.

"Take you home with me!" repeated the amazed Jake. "If you don't clear out I'll box your ears and kick you across the street."

Several of the bystanders murmured at this threat, and showed a disposition to defend old Mr. Tumbrell.

"Jake, I'll give you every dollar I've got if you'll do that."

This was said smilingly, while the old gentleman beamed more radiantly than ever on the exasperated Calkins.

"You will, eh?" shouted Jake, losing his self-control. "Very well, then; we'll give you a chance."

He made a rush at the innocent Mr. Tumbrell, who stepped nimbly back a pace or two. Then, like a flash, his left hand shot over the shoulders of his assailant, and his iron grip closed on the upper part of his coat.

In a twinkling Jake Calkins was inverted,

jerked across the broad knee of the old man, who applied the palm of his right hand with as much vigor as a mother ever used her slipper on her disobedient offspring.

Jake struggled and swore and kicked and squirmed, but he could no more help himself than if caught beneath the wheels of a locomotive.

The crowd yelled with delight, while the right hand descended with such force that the dust flew, and it looked as if the discomfited Jake would be actually flattened out.

Before that serious point was reached, however, Mr. Tumbrell released him, doing so in his own characteristic fashion.

He flung him fully a dozen feet from him, taking care, however, that he should land on his feet instead of on his head.

As may be supposed, Jake Calkins was considerably demoralized, and stared around him as though he did not fully grasp the situation.

Some of the bystanders had all they could do to keep from falling to the ground in the excess of their hilarity over the matchless and unexpected manner in which the old man had turned the tables on the vaunting falsifier, Jake Calkins.

The latter stood a minute or so stupidly staring until the tumult had subsided. Then addressing Mr. Tumbrell he asked:

"Did you say you wished to go home with me?"

"I did think about it, but—"

"Give me your hand! You shall go home with me and stay a month. You've won my heart."

And to the surprise of all, he stepped forward and extended his hand to his conqueror.

It need not be said that Mr. Tumbrell accepted the proffer and shook it most cordially.

Orson Oxx had punished Jake Calkins for the contemptible manner in which he had deceived him and Donald Marvin.

He had not a particle of ill-will toward the thoroughly humbled individual, who did not dream how it was he was laid out in such hurricane fashion.

"I'll be happy to accept your invitation," said the old fellow, beaming more benignantly than ever.

"Come on then."

The crowd now pushed forward, bent on shaking Mr. Tumbrell by the hand.

Others insisted that he should go to the hotel and drink with them, while still others forced cigars upon him who had risen so mightily in their estimation.

Mr. Tumbrell broke out in smiles, his face being all aglow with happiness, but he was forced to decline their kind expressions, saying that he never drank nor smoked.

He finally agreed to indulge in a glass of lemonade to please one individual, who seemed to feel highly honored that he should accept even that little favor.

A proposition to take up a collection for him was enthusiastically adopted, despite the remonstrances of the old gentleman himself.

More than two dollars was gathered in, and this was absolutely forced upon the astonished detective, principally because of his remark that he had got off the right road and was short of funds.

At last Jake Calkins, who certainly admired the old man more than any one else, drew him away from his friends, and they entered the carriage, which was waiting to be taken in the direction of Farmingdale.

Need we add that Mr. Orson Oxx improved to the utmost the golden opportunity which was thus placed within his reach?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DONALD MARVIN MEETS TWO ACQUAINTANCES.

DONALD MARVIN had abundant cause to feel grateful for his rescue from the burning cabin, and he thanked Heaven over and over again, while plodding over the sandy road in the neighborhood of Farmingdale.

Often too he looked at the figure of the huge negro, Rotary Hastings, who moved forward with the tireless gait of an ox, and with as much ease.

"Heaven bless him," murmured the young lawyer, "he looks upon that which he did as only a very ordinary occurrence. Perhaps it was such to him, and yet it meant a great deal more to me. Had I the means, I would make him rich for life, and," added Donald, after a moment's pause, "more than likely would thereby render him miserable."

But the thoughts of the youth were very

busy in another direction, while the African kept up a steady flow of his pointless talk.

Donald reflected that a deliberate attempt had been made to burn him to death.

There could be no doubt on that point, for many reasons which the reader already understands.

The question then remained as to who the guilty parties were.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, perhaps, there could be no question as to their identity.

It must have been Luff Swank or Hank Wagsnaff, or both.

This much established, it followed that they had divined the course taken by Donald, who was hunting for his beloved, and they had not been much behind him in arriving on the ground.

Whether they had taken another route or not was a small matter.

They were there; that was enough.

Orson Oxx was right when he declared it as his belief that those two scoundrels would do their most to prevent a dangerously close approach to the place where Eva Hildreth was kept in hiding.

They had traced both him and the detective.

The more Donald reflected on the business, the more was he struck by its extraordinary features.

In one of the most law-abiding States of the Union, an outrageous proceeding was being pushed with such vigor that it looked as if it must succeed.

True, it owed its success up to this point, to the fact that Eva, the principal party concerned was thoroughly deceived, and had no suspicion of the purpose of those around her.

But more than one man was openly defying the law, with a view to carrying out a daring swindle.

But, such being the fact, it only remained for Donald to face the difficulties and overcome them.

His sable rescuer had seen nothing of either of the criminals, nor, so far as he himself could judge, were they anywhere in the immediate neighborhood.

Nevertheless, he had received abundant proof that they were most uncomfortably close to him.

"They will seek to interfere with me again, when they find I am nearing the place where Eva, my beloved, is."

Some time after, when they had passed beyond Farmingdale, and were approaching the home of Mr. Mart Calkins, Rotary Hastings said:

"De next house beyont on de leff-hand side am whar de gemman dat you am lookin' fur am libben."

"Do you not go with me?"

"I will, if yer wants me to do de same, but I kin make a mighty short cut to de ole shanty ob mine whar de old woman and de little chicks am waitin' for de ole man. I tells yer, boss, dat I'm so anxious to let 'em know 'bout de wealf, dat dey hab fell beirs to, dat I kin hardly wait till I gets dar. I'm jist ready to shout, 'Glory Hallelujah,' and when de tidings am made known, dar'll be de biggest shoutin' and gnashin' ob teeth dat you eber read about. But ef you wants me to go wid you, I'll be jest as happy."

"I couldn't think of allowing you to do so," said Donald, with a smile. "Go to your family, and I only am sorry that I am not able to make the gift—"

"Dar, dar! none ob dat," interrupted Rotary, with a wave of his huge hand; "you've made us all happy for de rest ob our onnateral lives. Good-by, God bless you and your wife, and little ones."

"But, Rotary, I have no wife nor children."

"I mean dem dat you're goin' to hab."

Shaking hands warmly, the happy negro departed.

Donald resumed his tramp through the sand, his heart once more beating high with hope.

"Every indication points to Eva being at the house of Mart Calkins," he said to himself, "and that is not far off. If she is there, I will take her away at once, and we should be in Philadelphia this evening at the latest. What a surprise it will be!"

"What won't men do for money?" mused the young man, beginning to philosophize as he walked along. "They will break up friendships, cast aside love, lie, disappoint, swindle, and even take human life. There are Swank and Wagsnaff—"

There they were, sure enough.

The sound of carriage-wheels close behind him caused Donald to turn his head.

A single horse was approaching, drawing a two-seated carriage, in which sat a couple of men.

That single glance showed them to be the very wretches whose names he had just pronounced.

The discovery was anything but a pleasant one, but it did not intimidate the chivalrous lover.

He merely felt at his hip to make sure that the revolver placed in his hands by Orson Oxx the detective, was there.

It was at his command.

The vehicle was no more than a hundred yards behind him, and the horse was advancing on a walk.

Donald soon found that so long as he kept moving, he neither gained nor lost ground.

This was an annoying state of affairs, and he determined to end it.

He slackened his gait several times, by way of experiment, but the scoundrels did the same.

Finally, when within a short distance of the lane leading to the home of Mart Calkins, he stopped short, turned about and waited for them to come up.

"We must meet, and I don't mean that they shall have all to say about it."

Swank and Wagsnaff must have been surprised at the act, but they accepted the situation and continued moving forward, until they came opposite where he stood.

Luff Swank was driving and seemed suddenly to recognize him.

"Well, I declare," he exclaimed, as he drew up, "this is a surprise, Mr. Marvin."

"How are you?" called out Wagsnaff, leaning over and extending his hand.

But Donald kept back and did not notice the greeting.

"Come, get in and ride with us; we're going your way."

"No, sir; I prefer to walk."

"You left us rather suddenly, yesterday."

"I found out you were a couple of scoundrels and I could not part company with you too soon."

"Be careful," admonished Swank, "we are not used to such words."

"It makes no difference whether you are used to them or not; they are true."

"It isn't always safe to speak the truth."

"There is no need of our using any deception toward each other, or pretending to do so; we understand this business. Ward Hildreth is doing his utmost to make it appear that Eva his niece leaped off the ferry-boat the other night and is drowned, so that he may secure the property left by his brother. It was Cora who made the leap, and who was picked up. The two are not far away from this very spot, and I mean to find Eva, my betrothed, and take her home. There's the situation, and neither you nor all the villains in the country can prevent me."

"Be careful of what you say."

"And further, you may pile up fagots outside the cabin when I am sleeping and seek to burn me to death, but Providence is on my side and will defeat you every time."

"Suppose," said Swank, with an ominous glitter of his eye, "that we call you to account for this language?"

"Do so, and there's my answer!"

And he whipped out his revolver, cocked it, and leveled the weapon at the two criminals.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DONALD MARVIN MAKES AN IMPORTANT CALL.

IN the language of the great West, Donald Marvin had the drop on Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff.

At the very moment they supposed the young lawyer and lover was completely vanquished, he whipped out his revolver and leveled it at them.

There are few persons who can calmly confront a weapon of that sort, when they see that the finger on the trigger has to press it only a trifle harder to send the leaden messenger on its fatal errand.

Wagsnaff moved his left hand cautiously toward his hip, but the youth, who stood in the road, detected it on the instant.

"Attempt to touch a weapon and I will fire; Messrs. Swank and Wagsnaff, this may have been sport to you, but it has now become serious business. You may sit there in that carriage as long as you choose, and so long as you

do so, I shall keep you covered with my revolver."

"Wall you seem to have the drop on us, pard," remarked Swank with a faint grin; "what's the racket?"

"Drive on."

"Drive on it is."

Swank jerked the lines and the horse started forward on his usual walk.

The curtains of the carriage were rolled up at the sides and rear, so that the occupants could look in any direction they chose, but neither gazed behind them.

They seemed to have awakened to the fact that they were dealing with any kind of man except a timid one.

The light of the clear eye showed that he was in deadly earnest and they really had a more narrow escape from death than either imagined.

Donald lowered his pistol, when they moved on, but he watched them until they vanished from sight around a bend in the highway.

Then he returned his weapon to place and walked forward.

"There's the house," he said to himself, looking through the sparse pines at a dwelling standing something more than two hundred yards back from the road.

What he first noticed was its similarity to the home of Jake Calkins. Both seemed to have been constructed after the same model, which was not very elaborate or ornate.

The wealth of the brothers was about the same and may be characterized as not very extensive.

The dwelling on which he was now looking with an intensity of interest that cannot be described was much older than the other.

The lane leading to it from the main road was lined with tall pines which must have been set out many years before. They were regular and handsome, and would have made an appropriate ornament to the entrance to a castle or mansion of the old world.

As Donald turned into the avenue he fixed his eyes on the plain and by no means attractive building, viewing it with an interest that was painful from its very intensity.

"I have been disappointed many times, but something tells me the end is close at hand—Ah!"

He caught a glimpse of a figure clothed in black, which at that moment flitted by one of the upper windows, vanishing almost before he saw it.

"That must be Eva!" he gasped, hastening his footsteps.

A minute later he stepped upon the low porch and rapped sharply on the door.

It was instantly opened by Mrs. Mart Calkins. She looked more vinegary than usual, suspecting that the caller was some officer, likely to make trouble.

"Well, sir, what do you want?"

"Is this Mrs. Calkins?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you a couple of ladies staying with you?"

"I have."

"I will be obliged if you will permit me to see them."

"What do you want to see 'em for?"

Donald was angered at this impertinence.

"It is upon private business."

"Well—"

She hesitated, turned about and asked.

"Do you want to see 'em both?"

"Miss Eva Hildreth is the lady whom I wish to meet."

All this time, Donald was well aware that some one was standing a short distance behind Mrs. Calkins, where she could hear every word.

But he cared little for that, as he had no ends to serve by concealing his purpose from any one.

He had come upon legitimate business, with which no human being had the right to interfere, nor did he intend to permit such interference.

Mrs. Calkins turned about once more and spoke something in a low tone which he did not catch nor could he detect the answer, though he heard the sound of the voice.

"Miss Eva has been staying here, with her cousin, but she went out for a stroll a short time ago. I guess she'll be in pretty soon; will you sit down and wait?"

But for the latter remark, Donald would not have believed a syllable of this reply.

As it was, he doubted the truth of the words,

though as a matter of policy, he affected to believe them.

"Thank you," he answered, "I have come a long ways and cannot go back without seeing her."

She handed him a chair, which he carried a short distance away, and, setting it down under one of the shade trees, deposited himself thereon, and tipped back against the trunk of the tree, with legs crossed in genuine American fashion.

Then he removed his hat and used it as a fan, for he was warm from his hurried walk.

He had sat thus only a few minutes when Cora Hildreth issued from the door and advanced smilingly toward him.

Donald had met her, when she was visiting his betrothed a couple of years before, but had little more than a speaking acquaintance with her.

He instantly sprung to his feet and saluted her with great courtesy, at the same time insisting that she should take his chair.

She declined most graciously.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Marvin, and am sorry that my cousin is not in just now, but she cannot be away long."

"I hope not, for I am anxious to see her."

"I can understand that," said Cora, with what was intended to be a very significant smile.

"I hardly expected to be compelled to look for her in this part of the country."

"No, of course not, and she had no idea of coming here, nor did I dream of such a thing until a moment before we started. A most unpleasant occurrence to my father rendered it necessary."

Miss Cora's voice trembled just a little, and she seemed on the point of giving way to tears, but succeeded in restraining herself.

Donald Marvin thoroughly understood the treacherous woman.

He knew she must be one of the prime conspirators, but he wished to avoid everything like a quarrel or scene with her.

He allowed her, therefore, to make leading remarks without following them up.

He intimated that he supposed there must have been some good reason for such a step, else it never would have been taken, but he showed no curiosity to learn the precise cause of it all.

Miss Cora certainly held no intention of imparting any knowledge that was not worth the asking, and she could not help perceiving that her company was a burden to him.

She therefore excused herself and withdrew within the house.

She was all smiles when she vanished from view, and she went straight up-stairs to her room.

The instant she entered her whole nature underwent a transformation.

She became the embodiment of hate, rage and desperation.

And yet she restrained herself so that one might have been in the adjoining room without suspecting that she was suffering from any unusual emotion.

She clinched her hands and bit her lips until the blood showed.

"Have we lost?" she muttered with flashing eyes; "has he, the old fool in Philadelphia, delayed until it is too late? Dolt, to tell me that it would take weeks! I would have done it in a day; why are all men alike in such affairs? It needs a woman to succeed."

"Where can Eva be? She has gone to take a walk; but she never did so before without asking me to join her. Can it be she has left me for good? No, no, she would not dare to do that; she knows I would follow and kill her! And why has he come here? He has come for her, but he shall never take her away until Ward has secured the money; I swear it, and I shall find some way to prevent."

The fire of resolution flamed from her eyes, and she reached out and clutched the dagger which still lay on the stand.

"I shall prevent it—yes, I shall prevent it!" she repeated, fondling the weapon as though she loved it; "and this shall show me the way."

CHAPTER XXX.

A COUPLE OF INTERESTING INTERVIEWS.

DONALD MARVIN had sat in his chair but a few minutes, after the withdrawal of Cora Hildreth, when Mrs. Calkins appeared at the door, approaching so softly from the interior that he did not hear the slightest sound of her footsteps.

As he looked up, he saw that her eyes were fixed on him with a peculiar, inquiring expression.

She seemed to be trying to decide in her own mind whether he was a bogus friend of the lady, or an officer of the law who meditated evil against every one on whom he fastened his attention.

Finally she raised her hand, and beckoned him to approach.

Wondering what she could wish, Donald rose from his seat and advanced toward her.

Just as he placed his foot on the porch, she raised her hand and whispered:

"Sh! don't make any noise."

He obeyed, stepping as carefully as he could.

He paused near the woman, and anxiously waited to hear what she had to say.

"She's gone up-stairs," said Mrs. Calkins, glancing furtively behind her; "she can't hear us."

"I suppose not; but I do not care if she does."

"Oh, she's an awful woman! I heard her threaten to kill the other lady to-day."

"You did?" exclaimed the amazed Marvin.

"What did she do that for?"

"'Cause the other lady—that's Miss Eva—said she wouldn't stay here any longer, and she was going home right away."

"Did she say that?"

"She did."

"Has she gone?"

"Are you a friend of hers?" asked Mrs. Calkins, ignoring the question of her visitor.

"I am the nearest friend she has in the world."

"Be you engaged?"

"We are."

"You don't say so! Well, she's a mighty nice girl, I can tell you, though I don't s'pose there's any need of saying that to you."

"No, I have been aware of it for a long time; but what did Miss Eva do when her life was threatened?"

"She just talked so mild-like to the other woman, that she flopped down in her chair and busted out crying."

"You were present, were you?"

"I—ahem!—I happened to be in the next room—you see—and I accidentally overheard 'em."

"I understand—certainly."

Donald did understand, but he had no wish to embarrass the woman who showed a commendable desire to befriend him.

"But that 'ere Miss Eva ain't any fool."

"I never knew of her being accused of it," said Donald, smiling over the characteristic compliment of Mrs. Calkins.

"She was putting on all the time; she knowed there was something wrong and she fooled the other woman."

"In what way?"

"She talked so nice."

"How did that fool her?"

"It made her—that's the one up stairs—think she was sorry and wasn't going to leave her."

"I am glad to find that my engaged wife was able to vanquish the other on her own ground."

"It wasn't her ground, it was our house."

"All the same; but what started the difficulty between them?"

"I forgot to tell you; it was a telegraphic dispatch which my husband Mart got some-way, and forgot to hand to the young lady."

"To which one?"

"The one that's up-stairs; it dropped out of Mart's coat (he's gone to New York you know), and I thinking nothing, picked it up and handed it to the angelic one—that's the one that ain't up-stairs—and she thinking nothing too, opened it and read it. There must have been something in that which told her everything, for it excited her awful."

"I wonder what it could have been," said Donald; "I would give a good deal to know."

Mrs. Calkins cleared her throat.

"Well—ahem!—you see, when the telegraphic dispatch fell out of Mart's coat and I picked it up, it couldn't have been sealed very good."

"Exactly."

"And it kind of flopped open."

"Nothing could have been more natural."

"And without thinking, I happened to cast an eye onto it."

"Perfectly proper that you should do so."

"And I caught a few words."
 "You couldn't have helped doing so, had you tried, as I am sure you did."
 "The tele-graphic dispatch was from Philadelphia and I think signed W. H., though I disremember 'bout that."
 "What did it say?"
 "It told Miss Cora to keep t'other one here for two or three days, that everything was going splendidly and there would be lots of swag, if you know what that means."
 "It meant plunder as used there; and you tell me Miss Eva read that, do you?"
 "She read every blessed word of it."
 A light broke in upon the brain of the lover. It could no longer be doubted that Eva had awakened to the truth. She had learned that her supposed cousin was plotting her ruin, and she had determined to leave her at once.
 "When Miss Eva came down-stairs what did she say to you?"
 "She asked me not to tell her cousin, and then she bade me good by and walked away, saying that she would die before she would ever return to the house ag'in."
 "She did!" exclaimed the astonished Marvin.
 "Why didn't you tell me this before?"
 "I wanted to keep the story straight and come to the point in the regular way."
 "She has left then, has she?"
 "Yes."
 "Does the one up stairs know it?"
 "No; though I think she is beginning to suspect."
 "Which way did Miss Eva go?"
 "Down the lane."
 "On foot?"
 "Yes, and carrying nothing but her parasol in her hand and a small cabbie."
 "In which direction did she turn at the end of the lane on reaching the main road?"
 "Toward Farmingdale."
 "That can hardly be, for I came from that direction and would have met her."
 "Then she must have turned the other way."
 "Didn't you see?"
 "No; I was watching the one up-stairs, 'cause I was afeared of her when she would wake up, she being asleep when the angelic one went away."
 "Then she must have taken the road leading to Freehold?"
 "So it would seem, and I warned her that it was an awful long walk to that town."
 "I cannot suppose she intended to go afoot all the distance, but must have counted on getting a ride."
 "I s'pose so, but I think, for all that, that she has gone to Farmingdale and has taken the cars for him."
 Donald Marvin thanked the woman for the highly valuable information she had given him and left at once.
 He felt that he had lost too much valuable time already.
 "It's exceedingly strange," he said to himself, "that I should have missed her. It cannot be that she has started for Freehold on foot; the distance is too great, but if she went toward Farmingdale, which isn't far off, how was it we failed to meet each other?"
 "From what Mrs. Calkins told me as to the time of her departure, she could not have reached the station before me."
 "It's curious that I have approached Eva so close," he said, with a sigh, "and yet seem fated to miss her every time."
 Donald had been gone a few minutes only, when Mrs. Calkins was alarmed by hearing a soft footfall on the stairs.
 "It's her," she rightly concluded at once, her heart throbbing faster; "I wouldn't be surprised if she heard us talkin' together; some folks is mighty mean 'bout listenin'. I never think of doing such a thing, 'cause I s'pose I do it without thinkin'!"
 Cora Hildreth seemed as cool as ever, though her face was paler as she walked across the floor.
 "Mrs. Calkins," said she in a voice as gentle as that of a cooing dove, "do you know where my cousin is?"
 "No ma'm, unless she fell into the well and was drowned."
 "I don't wish to hear any such trifling. You know where she has gone."
 "I do not; how should I know?"
 "My cousin is sometimes a little off, you know."
 "No, I didn't know it."
 "Well, you do now; she is slightly crazy at times."

"Stars and goodness! is that so?"
 "Of course it is or I wouldn't tell you. What did she say, when she went away?"
 "Nothing 'tickler."
 "But she must have made some remark?"
 "She said she was going to take a walk."
 "Is that all?"
 "I believe she said she wouldn't come back again."
 "She did!" exclaimed Cora flaming up; "why didn't you tell me that?"
 "She bein' crazy, as you say, I didn't s'pose there was any need of your being told."
 "But you didn't know she had such a weakness at the time she made the remark to you?"
 "But I know it now, don't I? What's the odds?"
 And the countrywoman couldn't see what the very quiet but very angry lady was driving at.
 "Where is that young man?" asked Cora looking out at the door at the vacant chair.
 "He has gone after his beloved Eva."
 "Which way did she take?"
 "Down the lane; that's what I told him."
 "Did she turn to the right or left?"
 "That's what he asked and I couldn't tell him for certain, but I think she went toward Farmingdale, though I's just as likely she took the other course and made for Freehold. The best way I s'pose will be to go to both places, though by the time you could do that I shouldn't wonder if she was in Philadelphia and married to that handsome young man that is so worried about—"
 "Shut up!" shouted the enraged Cora with a stamp of her foot that caused the voluble woman to leap several inches in the air and end her observations with a gasp of alarm.
 "I wonder whether she's gone up-stairs for that dagger," said Mrs. Calkins, as the infuriated young woman seemed to fly across the room to the upper story; "I've had that pot of boiling water ready ever since I heard 'em quarrelin' and I'll make sure the broom is where I can lay my hands onto it; but," she added with a sigh, "I do wish it was time for Mart or Jake to come."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DONALD MARVIN MEETS A FRIEND.

DONALD MARVIN stopped on reaching the main highway from the lane, undecided whether to turn to the right or left.
 "A great deal depends on my decision," he said, looking first one way and then another in his perplexity.
 "There can be little doubt, now that she has left her cousin and started for home, that she will reach there with little trouble. This is a civilized country, and she has but to make her case known to the first one she meets and she will receive all the assistance she can need."
 "She must have considerable money with her, and that will accomplish almost everything in this world."
 "Common sense and reasoning would indicate that she had gone in the direction of Farmingdale, and yet how could we have missed seeing each other? True, I started from a point east of that village, where she would stop, but I was on this side of the railroad station before she could have reached it, and we ought to have met."
 "Would to heaven we had done so!"
 Wishes, however, could accomplish nothing, and Donald decided to turn to his left, which was toward Freehold, and to proceed until he found reason to believe himself mistaken.
 He searched the sandy walk at the side of the highway in the hope of catching sight of the imprint made by the Cinderella-like shoes of his beloved, but was unable to discover anything of the kind.
 This caused him no little uneasiness, and he stopped, undecided whether to go on or not.
 Fortunately, at that juncture a carriage came in sight among the trees, in which he saw two men were seated.
 "I will make inquiries of them," Donald decided, "and if they have seen nothing of her I will turn back toward Farmingdale."
 The thought of Swank and Swagness led Donald to scrutinize the two closely.
 One seemed to be an honest-looking old farmer, and the countenance of the other wore a familiar look.
 A second searching glance showed Donald that it was his acquaintance of the previous day—Jake Calkins.
 "It's lucky for him that Orson Oxx has gone to New York," said Donald to himself;

"but this fellow with him may have something to tell me."
 Jake did not seem abashed in the least when he identified the pedestrian, but smiled and saluted him like an old friend.
 Donald raised his hand as a signal that he wished to speak to him.
 Then, instead of addressing Calkins, he spoke to the old fellow in spectacles, who sat with his mouth open.
 "I am looking for a young lady, who may have gone in this direction; she was on foot; have you seen such a person?"
 "What might be her name?"
 "What difference does that make?"
 "I must know her name."
 "Miss Hildreth?"
 "White or black?"
 "White."
 "How was she dressed?"
 "In deep mourning."
 "Anybody with her?"
 "Most likely she was alone, though she may have found a friend."
 "How long ago was it?"
 "It must have been within a couple of hours."
 "She was dressed in mourning, you say?"
 "Yes."
 "She was very pretty, wasn't she?"
 "She was quite attractive."
 "Jake," said the old farmer, turning toward the driver at his side, "did we meet any such piece of caliker as that?"
 "Nary a meet, Mr. Tumbrell."
 "This friend of mine," said the old man, once more turning his beaming countenance on the questioner in the road, "is proud of his reputation as the champion liar of Ocean and Monmouth counties, but he forgot himself just now, and I think spoke the truth. No, young man, we haven't met no sich lady as you're inquirin' 'bout; has she give you the mitten?"
 "No, but I can vouch for the untruthfulness of that man beside you. He told a series of the most appalling falsehoods to myself and a friend that you ever listened to."
 Mr. Jake Calkins grinned, and spat his tobacco juice over his horse, showing by his manner that he was proud of his reputation.
 "Why didn't you dress his 'tarnal hide for him?"
 "He took good care to get away before we found him out, but if my friend meets him, he will call him to account."
 "See here," said Jake Calkins, "I struck an earthquake in Freehold in the shape of this old man, and when you meet your friend you can tell him that account is settled, and the balance is on my side. Good-day, sir."
 Jake Calkins whipped his horse into a trot, but had not gone far when Mr. Tumbrell at his side begged to be let out.
 "What do you want to git out for?"
 "I think I have seen that young man before; he looks like a chap that has been sparkin' my daughter Mary Ann, down to Barnegat; shouldn't wonder if he's a relative. I want to speak to him."
 "I will wait for you; hurry up, for I am worried about what that feller told me."
 "If it ain't him, I'll come back right away; if it is him, I'll want to have a talk, and will walk to the house, which ain't fur enough off to bother me."
 "All right; don't forget to come and see me up there."
 Before the old man reached the spot where the surprised Donald Marvin awaited him, he turned about and waved his hand.
 "You needn't wait, Jake. Drive on and expect me there in the course of a half-hour."
 "All right," called back Jake Calkins, starting his team forward at a rapid gait again.
 "We'll expect you sartin' sure."
 "And you can take it out in expecting," muttered Mr. Tumbrell, extending his hand to Donald, who took it, saying:
 "You are a stranger to me— My heavens! is that you, Oxx?"
 The laugh of the Man of Iron betrayed him, as he intended it should.
 "This is no time for jesting," added the detective. "I'll give you the history of what has taken place since we parted this morning as soon as I have the leisure. I don't understand what this means on your part."
 Donald Marvin quickly related what he had learned from Mrs. Calkins.
 "Did you notice when you referred to it how Jake started?" asked Orson Oxx.
 "I did."

"He's mystified and anxious. Observe how fast he is hurrying to the house of his brother, where he left the ladies."

"Didn't he suspect you?"

"Not in the least. I met him in Freehold, made him mad, got him to attack me, gave him a good trouncing, won his affection thereby, and he insisted on my going out home with him. On the way I wormed out all he knows about the whole business."

"And as I have told you, I was equally successful with Mrs. Calkins, his sister-in-law."

"Have you seen anything of Swank or Wagsnaff?"

"I rather think so."

And thereupon Donald told of the attempt to burn him in the cabin, and his own act of drawing his pistol on them, not far from where the two then stood in the highway.

"That's news indeed," said Orson Oxx, with a serious expression of countenance, "and I may as well say frankly that I don't like it."

"And what is there so significant about it?"

"There's a good deal more than there ought to be. Don't you see that we know the whereabouts of all parties, except Swank, Wagsnaff and Miss Eva Hildreth?"

"Do you believe, as the case stands, that the absence of these three bear any relation to each other?"

"I am afraid they do. At any rate, I feel that we have reached the gravest crisis of this extraordinary business. There is no time to be lost. We must get to work in sober earnest—and at once."

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALL AT SEA.

ORSON OXX, the detective and the Man of Iron, summed up the alarming situation in the declaration that they knew where all the parties concerned were, with the exception of Luff Swank, Hank Wagsnaff and Eva Hildreth.

Unquestionably the absence of these three bore some relation to each other.

"Do you not think she has gone in the direction of Freehold?" asked Donald Marvin, during their brief, but earnest discussion in the highway.

"Impossible; why should she have done so and placed the burden of such a long walk upon herself, when there was nothing to be gained by it? No, she has made the little village of Farmingdale her objective point and there is where we must look for her."

"It has seemed to me that if she took that course she and I ought to have met."

"The probabilities are that way, but the fact that you did not is no evidence against the theory."

"Then we must go to Farmingdale?"

"Without delay."

"It is a considerable distance."

"I may as well utilize the admiration of Jake Calkins," said Orson Oxx, with a smile; "I will borrow his team, unless he is going home himself, in which case I will ride."

"What shall I do?"

"Walk on in the direction of the station and I will overtake you very speedily."

This suggestion was carried out.

Donald Marvin walked up the road over which he had passed so recently, while the old farmer as he seemed to be turned into the lane and made his way to the home of Mart Calkins, that personage being absent, while his brother Jake was in his place.

Jake, as may well be supposed was in a state of mind over what had taken place during the day and he was at a loss as to what to do.

But, great as was his perplexity, it could not lessen his admiration for farmer Tumbrell, who had given him the most thorough trouncing of his life.

He introduced him to his sister-in-law, as his particular friend from Barnegat, who was going to accompany him home to spend a month with him.

"Not just yet," said the old gentleman, with a beaming countenance; "but I want Jake to do me the favor to lend me his team for a drive to Farmingdale."

"Of course, there ain't anything I wouldn't do for the man that can uphold an argyment in such a wig'rous style as you."

Orson was apprehensive that the fellow, in the excess of his admiration, might insist on accompanying him, but he was restrained by his anxiety about the lady who was missing.

"The fact is," he said to the friend who pos-

sessed his confidence, "both of them women is gone."

"Ah; does the lady here know where either went?"

"That's the worst of it; the first got scared over the other that was becomin' too obstreperous and cleared out; then when the one that's on her muscle found it out, she just got up and got likewise."

"Did this second lady know whither the first went?"

"No more than does my respected sister-in-law; the old boy himself can't tell where either of 'em has gone and I'm worried like the blazes."

"I don't see what you have to be worried about; it doesn't consarn you at all accordin' to my ijee."

"I've a notion," said Jake, lowering his voice and becoming very confidential, "that there's a detective somewhere in this neighborhood."

"What makes you think that?"

"Them two fellers that I took out in the carriage last night and got cotched in the storm was very nosey; it's my ijee that the younger one is in love with one of the gals and the other is a detective; I wish I knowed, and could meet the detective."

"For what reason?"

"I would like to lambast him; I'd give a good deal if I could git a chance at that sneak-in' detective! I'd knock him so stiff, that he wouldn't grow limber ag'in for six months."

"It's luck for him that you don't meet," remarked Mr. Tumbrell, with a shake of his head; "but you might be mistaken, like you was to-day in Freehold you know."

"No I wouldn't," said Jack, stoutly. "There is only one man in New Jarsey that can stand me on my head in that style, and that's you."

"Possibly not, but I am anxious to drive to Farmingdale to see a person that I think will be there."

"While you're about it, Tumbrell, jes' keep a lookout for a couple of young ladies dressed in black. If you should see 'em try and persuade 'em to come back home with you. Fact is," added Jake Calkins, with a serious expression of countenance, "I'm afeard there's something wrong about this bus'ness."

"I've no doubt there is from what you told me, but I must be off; good-by."

He sprang into the carriage, took up the lines, and struck the horse into a trot.

The avenue was quickly passed, and Orson Oxx turned into the main highway, smiling to himself as he reflected upon the mistake Jake Calkins had made.

"If he ever finds out that old Mr. Tumbrell, who handled him so roughly in Freehold, is a genuine detective, he will be surprised, I am sure."

Orson Oxx had not driven far along the road when he caught sight of Donald Marvin, who was anxiously awaiting him.

"I've been studying the tables," said the young man, when he had taken his place beside his friend, "and I find we are in good time."

"How so?"

He took from his pocket a small card upon which he traced the figures, marking the time of the arrival and departure of trains.

"There has no train gone east or west within the last three hours, but there is one due quite soon."

"Have you the schedule of the other road?"

"Yes; I have them both and have studied them. There is very little travel at this hour of the day; there will be more toward evening."

"That is fortunate," replied the detective, urging the horse to all the speed of which he was capable.

The road was quite heavy, but the animal like the bipeds of that section, was accustomed to it, and when urged pretty vigorously, seemed to travel without difficulty.

As may be supposed, they kept their eyes and ears open, for Eva Hildreth was not the only one for whom they were searching, although the lover at least would have given up every one else for a glimpse of her.

"It is most extraordinary," he said, when they came in sight of the village, "that I have been baffled so repeatedly in my efforts to meet my affianced wife."

"The course of true love, you know, never did run smooth."

"Nothing could have run smoother, so far as Eva and myself are concerned, but fate ap-

pears to have interposed to aggravate us at every turn."

"All of which confirms the truth of what was said by the immortal bard; but I am confident that everything will come out right—that virtue shall be rewarded and merit and truth shall triumph."

"That is all well enough in poetry and romance," said Donald, "but real life is different. Things there get at sixes and sevens and the devil seems very often to take particularly good care of his own."

"Tut, tut; that is not the talk of a hero; you must learn to labor and to wait."

"I've done very little but wait for the last few days, though there has been something in the shape of labor also."

Perhaps the disquietude and murmuring of Donald Marvin was increased by the fact that they were in sight of the railroad station, and the anxious looks which he cast in that direction failed to show him the one whom he yearned to see above all others.

He and Orson Oxx were speedily on the platform, where they made thorough inquiries of those who could not have failed to see the young lady had she been there any time during the day.

There had been no such person dressed in black; on that point every one was agreed.

It followed, therefore, that neither Cora nor Eva Hildreth had taken the course supposed by Donald Marvin and Orson Oxx.

The detective shook his head and looked perplexed.

"They must have gone the other way," said the lover, who felt as though fate had interposed against him again.

"It is out of the question," replied the detective, "I wish it was no worse than that."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FAIR FUGITIVE.

THE heart of Eva Hildreth was overflowing with tumultuous emotions when she dropped some money in the hand of Mrs. Peggy Calkins, bade her good-by, and walked down the cedar-lined avenue to the main highway.

As she had announced, she was determined never to go back to where her life was in such imminent peril from her treacherous, violent-tempered cousin.

Her eyes had been fully opened.

As we have already stated, she understood the tigerish nature of Cora, in all its height, and length, and depth, and breadth.

"Oh, if I could but communicate with Donald," she murmured, as she hurried along, "how quickly he would fly to my assistance; but why should I need assistance?" she suddenly asked herself, with no little vehemence. "I am my own mistress, and who interferes with me does so at his or her peril."

Reaching the main highway, she paused only a minute or so to decide.

It would have been the height of folly for her to undertake to walk to Freehold, when the distance was five times greater than to Farmingdale, where she could take the cars.

She turned to the right, therefore, and made haste toward that station.

Thus it was that the two lovers were actually advancing toward each other, without either suspecting the thrilling, blissful fact.

And thus it was also, that they came within a comparatively short distance before cruel destiny interfered, and turned the fair Eva aside.

Now that our heroine realized fully her peril, she showed an ingenuity as great as that of the one who had been plotting her ruin for such a long time.

She knew that Cora must awake pretty soon.

When she should find her cousin was gone, her suspicions would be aroused.

She would know Eva had fled.

The desperate woman would not long delay pursuit.

It would be a great advantage, therefore, if Eva could prevent her learning which road she had taken.

The chances were that Cora would suspect the fugitive had started for the nearest station. But she could not be certain unless some one told her or she could trace her footprints.

Eva, therefore, was careful to step where the impression of her shoe did not show.

She kept close to the side of the road, or rather to the wood.

There was no fence on either hand, so she was able to move among the trees, where it

would have required a Comanche Indian to detect and follow her trail.

Eva was certain that Cora would soon be in pursuit, and she felt an unspeakable dread of encountering her where she could not protect herself from the fury of the tigress.

"If we meet, it will be idle for me to hope to deceive her any longer.

"She knows that I was acting the hypocrite when I attempted to soothe her passionate excitement.

"If she asks me why I have gone, I shall tell her the truth; she has such a violent temper that she cannot restrain herself; she will attack me with the dagger, even though she cannot forget that we are in the State of New Jersey, where they hang for murder."

Firmly convinced on this point, Eva was resolved to use every effort to elude her infuriated cousin.

Such being the case, it would follow naturally that the fugitive was able to travel as fast as any one of her sex, and, having obtained such a start, there was no reason why she should be overtaken.

Eva would have felt no such fear, could she have believed that Cora would journey on foot as she herself was doing.

She would be likely to secure more rapid means of conveyance.

Eva kept continually glancing behind her, fearful of discovering her pursuer.

"If I can reach Farmingdale ahead of her, she will not dare molest me.

"It will be equally effective if I find friends before getting there."

Her dread of the meeting along the highway became so intense, that when she reached a path which opened into the wood, she turned into it with a sigh of relief.

"She won't think of following me along this walk; it must lead somewhere, for there can be no such path unless made by persons' feet. I will follow it until I find a friend."

Eva learned, after going some distance, that she was not yet entirely free from the haunting terror which had caused her to leave the main highway.

Determined to shake off the dread, she branched off again, and walking among the trees, sat down on a fallen trunk that she might rest and reflect on the best course to pursue.

"If she should find me here she would kill me," said Eva to herself, glancing around her. "There was murder in her eye when she sprung up and held that dagger aloft. She would have brought it down on me, had I acted differently toward her."

The frightened fugitive kept continually looking toward the path, which she had left. At this moment she caught sight of a form moving among the trees.

With a gasp of fear, she shrunk back, but was relieved immediately after to observe that it was the figure of a stranger.

It was not a woman, but a man.

As he passed among the trees, Eva observed that he was an immense negro, who was walking fast and looking straight ahead, as though in a great hurry.

In short, it was our old acquaintance, Rotary Hastings, who had parted from Donald Marvin but a short time before.

By such a narrow chance did the lovers fail to meet!

Eva Hildreth was on the point of hailing him and she would have done so, had he not shown such haste in his gait.

She sat still until he had passed out of sight, when she rose, and making her way back to the path, followed after him.

"He cannot live far away and he will be a valuable friend to me in my extremity."

Our heroine had not walked far, when she was startled by the sound of loud singing.

She paused and listened.

"I run to de leap, and I leap o'er de wall;

Glory hallelujah!

I coteh that sinner fore he fall,

Glory hallelujah!

Don't you hear dat rumbling in de skies?

Glory hallelujah!

It makes my soul within me rise,

Glory hallelujah!"

This characteristic negro song rung through the woods with such heartiness and volume, that Eva suspected she was in the vicinity of an African camp-meeting.

"I am glad if such is the fact," she said to herself, hurrying forward.

But she was mistaken.

She had not gone far, when she came in

sight of a small cabin, standing among the pines, no other dwelling being in view.

The front showed a door and one window on the first floor and two windows on the upper and only remaining story.

At each of these windows were three colored children of varying ages and two were in the door.

The twelfth was turning somersaults in front of the structure, where he was continually getting in the way of Rotary Hastings and his wife, who were dancing a regular Virginia break down.

Husband and wife were singing with might and main as was every one of the dozen children.

They kept pretty good time, helping themselves to do so, by a regular clapping of their palms, one hand rising and falling upon the other, with the regularity of the violin-bows in Thomas's orchestra.

Every one seemed to have a strong musical voice, which rung through the pine woods with such effect that it was no wonder the lady believed she was approaching a camp meeting.

The fact is the family were overflowing with happiness: they had much more than they could contain.

And all on account of twenty dollars.

The children did not fully take in the situation, but they saw that their parents were joyful, and that was enough for them.

They were always ready to strike in on the chorus.

Eva was interested and amused.

There could be no mistake as to the genuineness of the happiness before her.

Furthermore, where there was so much jollity, there could be nothing wrong.

She could feel no hesitation in approaching such a group.

She stood but a few minutes, looking at them, when one of the urchins at an upper window caught sight of her.

Immediately he pointed in that direction and raised such a furious shouting that it caused a discord in the harmony, and the old gentleman looked up to learn the cause.

The next minute a sudden hush fell on the group, the dancing ceased, and the young African who had given the first signal came tumbling out of the second-story window.

The parents glanced at him, but immediately withdrew their attention.

They had observed that he struck on his head.

Consequently he was unharmed.

Eva advanced, laughing and pleased over the exhibition, for there was a heartiness about it all which would have amused any one.

She threw up her hands with a slight scream when the little African plumped from the second story on his head, but when she observed him immediately bound to his feet, as though made of india-rubber, she saw there was no call for sympathy.

Rotary took off his shabby hat, bowed low and said:

"We axes you to 'scuse us, but de fac' am we hab jess fell heiresses to big wealth."

"I am very glad to hear it."

"And we hab got to let off some our extra steam or we'll all bu'st our b'ilers."

"Don't allow me to interrupt your pleasures, I beg."

"Does yer really want to see us strike in ag'in?"

"I shall be delighted."

"All right. Here we goes, childer. You, Julius Cæ ar, don't open your mouf quite so much when you sing, 'cause you'll skear de young lady; an' you, Seraphinta Araminta Susannah, don't slap your foot down so hard, or you'll get a stun'bruise on your heel; an' you, George Washington Augustus Daniel Webster, ef you frows your head back any furdur when you opens your mouf you'll broke your neck. All ready!"

And again the forest arches rung with the rude but stirring music which seems natural to the race the world over, from the lowlands of Louisiana and the cane-brakes of Kentucky to the vast recesses of equatorial Africa.

"I am with friends," thought Eva Hildreth, as, seating herself on a rude bench, she watched the merrymaking of the people before her.

By and by the children vacated the windows and doors and began venturing near her.

They glanced slyly at the beauteous figure, the like of which they had never seen before.

All the time they kept up their vigorous

singing and clapping of hands and danced about like so many marionettes.

Suddenly a furious yell was heard.

The catastrophe the young lady feared from the moment the exercises were renewed had come.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SABLE FRIEND.

THE diminutive African who had employed himself in turning flip-flaps, as the best expression of his feelings, suddenly got in the way of his parents, who were looking upward, as they sung and danced about the open space in front of the house.

The two tumbled headlong over the urchin, who must have thought the cabin was descending, from the way in which he roared and yelled and tried to kick himself free from the sable avalanche that came down upon him. But no ordinary accident was capable of injuring them and the tumult subsided as suddenly as it opened.

When something like quiet was restored, Eva distributed some coins among the youngsters who scrambled for them like so many hungry chickens after corn.

"I'd advise you to stop," said Rotary, seating himself on the other end of the bench.

"And what objection can you have to a little amusement like that?" asked the young lady.

"You means well—I knows dat, but we can't stand too much prosperity; ef dis goes on much longer I'll jes' lay down on de ground, kick up my heels and die."

Eva now placed herself close to the good-natured African, who would have moved further along the bench could he have done so, without falling off.

The wife of Rotary sat herself on the other side, while the children, finding nothing more was likely to come to them in the way of pennies, scampered off into the woods, to continue their sport in their own way.

"What is your name, please?" asked Eva, by way of introducing her business.

"Rotary Hastings, at your service."

"Well, Rotary, I want to hire you to take me to Farmingdale."

"Golly! I hain't got no kerridge."

"I know the way and can easily walk there."

"Den what do you want ob such a niggah as me?"

"I want you to go along to take care of me."

"Gorrynation ag'in! what am you afeared ob! Dar ain't no bears nor lions nor elumphants, and only now and then a rattlesnake."

"I am afraid of several persons; I fear they are searching for me and I do not want to meet them."

Both Rotary and his wife turned and looked full at the handsome young lady in black, as though they suspected she was some wandering lunatic.

She divined their thoughts and smiled as she said:

"No, I'm not a bit out of my head; what I tell you is the solemn truth; I have reason to fear other persons."

"And you want me to take keer ob you?"

"I do until I can reach the railroad station; after that no one will dare molest me."

"I'll doo't, ob course I will; if you got tired I'll jes' pick you up in my arms and carry you, for I reckons you don't weigh no more dan a good-sized baby."

"I'm obliged to you, but I will not need so much assistance as that; I simply wish you to act as my escort."

"I'll doo't."

"Have you any weapons—that is, any firearms?" asked Eva, with some hesitation.

"Yas, I allers carry 'em wid me; shall I display 'em?"

"It is not necessary—"

"Dar dey am!"

Rotary thrust forward his two enormous feet, incased in cowhide boots, in such a position, as they projected upward from the ground, that they nearly shut off the view of the woods beyond.

"What do you t'ink ob 'em?"

"They seem to be very substantial," answered Eva, laughing in spite of herself.

"Reckon dey am."

"But are they always reliable?"

Rotary Hastings threw open his capacious mouth, flung his head back, and laughed until the woods rung.

"Am dey relumbler? Wal, I should say dey am, eb'ry time. Do you know how I works 'em?"

"I am sure I do not."

"When anybody goes to pick civil war wid me, I jes' step onto him; he neber smiles ag'in."

"Well, Rotary, I am anxious to engage you to act as escort for me to Farmingdale and I deem it my duty to say to you that you will be likely to have trouble before we get there."

"Let de trouble come; all I hab to do am to tink ob my wealf, and den I'll feel like shoutin' 'Glory hallelujah.' When do you want to go?"

"Quite soon; the day is getting well along."

"Hab you dined?"

"I wish no dinner, at least until we reach Farmingdale."

"We am jes' gettin' ready to dine; we habent a wery extensive dinner to-day, bein' it's nuffin' but a big watermelon. But de melon am sound, for I plugged it afore I stol—dat is afore I bought it."

Eva was too anxious and distressed to feel the least hunger, and it would have required a much greater degree, before she could have brought herself to accept the well-meant invitation of the good-natured fellow she had just engaged as her escort.

She insisted, however, that he should not deprive himself of his noonday meal, and Rotary went in with his wife and children.

They enjoyed a feast such as can hardly be imagined.

Eva was comparatively happy through sympathy, as she saw the frolicsome figures through the door and heard their boisterous merriment.

But, recalling her thoughts to herself, she felt that she had more than enough to cause her distress and sore misgiving.

"Cora must have awakened long ago and she is searching for me; when she finds I have not gone to the railroad station, she will hunt elsewhere. Those men whom I saw her talking with must be associated with her in this dreadful business. It will not take her long to find them, and they will hunt for me in company. I took great care to conceal my footprints, but Cora is very cunning. When she reaches this path she may think I have turned off. If she does, she will push on after me—"

A slight rustle caused her to start and look behind her.

She was sure the being she dreaded above all others was about to spring on her like a crouching tiger.

But it was only the falling of a leaf, and she breathed freely again.

"Those men must carry firearms, and Rotary will be unable to prevail against them."

The African did not keep her waiting long.

He came forth a few minutes after, his face shining with the melon-juice, which covered the whole expanse of countenance to his forehead even.

"I'm ready, missus," said he, respectfully.

Eva rose to her feet, nodded a pleasant goodbye to the wife and children, and followed Rotary along the path, toward the highway, which she had left but a short time before.

The negro was deeply impressed with the importance of his charge, and his breast swelled with happiness over the certainty he felt that a liberal reward awaited him when the brief journey should come to an end.

He meditated telling the young lady the particulars of his rescue of the young man, who came so nigh being burned to death in the cabin.

He was sure it would convince her of the reliability of those boots of his, which failed to inspire her with confidence in his aggressive powers.

But the negro was considerate enough to see that such a recital would only alarm her the more.

It would convince her that enemies were abroad, and they were more than likely to assail her and her sable friend, before they could reach a place of safety.

Had Rotary only suspected the relations which the young man whom he had befriended bore toward this young lady!

But there was nothing to suggest such a thought, nor could Eva herself suspect how recently this same Rotary had been in the company of her best beloved.

"Halle! dar am anoder young lady dressed

in black! Wonder ef she wants me to escorch her."

Eva Hildreth's heart was in her mouth.

For, looking beyond the huge figure in front of her, she saw Cora approaching!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE WOOD.

THE very thing which Eva Hildreth dreaded more than all else had come to pass.

While she was making her way along the path through the resinous pine woods, hoping to reach the railroad station, not far away, before any interruption could take place, she encountered the treacherous Cora.

How thankful was she that she had the big, courageous African, Rotary Hastings, between herself and the flaming fury.

"Rotary," whispered our heroine, "that's the wom—"

"Dat's what woman?" asked the negro, turning half-way round and looking over his shoulder.

"The one that is hunting for me."

"Wal, what ob it?"

"She has a dagger; she means to kill me; will you protect me?"

"Ob course I will; she can't hurt a flea; she's too little."

Cora had caught sight of Eva a moment before the latter saw her.

She came along the path as quietly as though she were out for an afternoon walk.

Rotary Hastings fixed his eye upon her with a curious interest, for he was certainly warranted in concluding that this was the most memorable day of his life.

"Dar's sumfin' wrong beah," he said to himself; "one ob dese female women am crazy; mos' likely bofe am, but dey ain't big 'nuff to hurt nuffin' nobow—only I'd like to know which am which, and which am t'other, so as not to get things mixed."

Much as Eva dreaded the meeting, she was careful to avoid showing any timidity.

She walked resolutely forward, keeping just enough to one side of her escort to allow her and Cora to see each other.

She looked straight into the eye of the fury, until they had approached within twenty feet.

Cora was still advancing, and Eva was resolved not to waver, though her heart was beating fast.

They certainly would have come still closer, had not the watchful Rotary concluded it was time to say something.

Stopping short, he turned half-way round and waved one hand to Cora and the other to Eva.

"Dar," said he, addressing both, "dat'll do; I prefers not to hab you any nigher to me."

Eva obeyed, but the indignant Cora kept on approaching.

"Didn't you hear me?" roared the negro, in a voice which might have been heard a furlong away; "I tole you to stop right dar whar you am!"

"What do you mean, sir, by speaking to me in that style?" demanded Cora, her eyes seeming to emit fire; "out of my path, dog!"

"Dat ain't my name," replied the escort, who, despite his evident mastery of the situation, began to feel himself in an embarrassing position; "I ain't used to bein' 'dressed in dat style 'cept in' by de folks what knows me."

I should like to know what business you have with me," said Eva, feeling it incumbent on her to say something to the fury, who stood alternately glaring at her and at the negro.

But, curiously enough, Cora refused to recognize the one who had been taught to look upon her as her cousin, so long as the obstruction was in her path.

To make certain Eva addressed her again.

"Cora, I know you to be a wicked woman; I wish to have nothing to do with you; step aside from our path and let us go by."

But Cora ignored her altogether, and, fixing her fiery glance on the huge African, she said in the same low, ominous voice as before:

"I've told you to stand aside and I now repeat the order for the last time."

"She is resolved on killing me," said Eva, in a voice just loud enough for Rotary to hear; "she has a dagger; don't let her pass you, or murder will be committed."

The huge African surveyed the woman who was slowly advancing, like a serpent gliding over the ground, and shook his head.

"Like to oblige you wery much, but de ting

can't be did; you wants to get at dat inner-child abind me and I don't—"

Losing all self-control, Cora Hildreth snatched the dagger from her pocket, where she had been carrying it, and all aflame with passion, made a surprising bound, straight at the African, who barred her advancement along the path to where the gentle Eva stood.

Had Cora been a man with a power anything like commensurate with her will, it would have gone hard with Rotary Hastings; but he was too prodigiously the superior of the little spitfire to suffer any harm from her rage.

He saw the white hand raised, and he caught the gleam of the thin polished steel which it grasped.

He knew that the terrible creature meant to kill and yet he was not frightened.

Rotary stepped back a single step.

Thus, when the woman struck, the blow fell altogether short.

Before she could repeat the effort, he closed his gigantic hand about the small wrist and gave it a twist, which caused her to drop the weapon.

The single gesture, slight as it was, gave to the savage Cora a terrible pang, and she uttered a scream.

"Don't hurt her!" pleaded Eva running forward and laying her hand on the beam-like arm of the negro.

"Hurt her!" repeated Rotary; "for free cents and a half I would wring her neck for her—de little onprincipled hussy!"

And he flung her several feet, Cora narrowly escaping a backward fall upon the ground.

Eva caught the gleam of the dagger in the path, and running forward picked it up in full sight of the baffled woman.

"She has no weapon," said Eva to her guard, intending the words for Cora also; she has no weapon, while I have; I can protect myself against her."

Cora Hildreth seemed transfixed, overborne by the appalling intensity of her own passion.

She stood motionless, glaring at the two beings before her.

Soe was breathing rapidly, her bosom rising and falling fast, while her whole manner plainly showed that had she the power, she would have torn the African and the fair one whom he was protecting, limb from limb.

"You might as well compose yourself and took a nap," said Rotary on whom this splendid exhibition was lost; "why, poor chile, you hain't got any more show in dis crowd dan a single shiner hab among a school ob bluefish."

All at once Cora Hildreth gave utterance to a piercing scream, which rung through the woods and made the ears of the others tingle.

"What's de use ob dat opera moo-ic?" asked Rotary; "if you want to sing, try some ob de good ole camp-meetin' toones."

But the crazed young woman emitted another cry, shriller and more piercing than before.

She was fairly beside herself with baffled rage, disappointment and fury.

Her eyes seemed enough to annihilate anything and everything upon which she might concentrate them.

Eva was appalled.

She had never seen anything like it.

Cora looked frightful, when she first drew her dagger upon her, but even that was mild compared to her expression now.

Rotary Hastings seemed scarcely to be affected.

He knew the infuriate could not harm either himself nor the young lady whom he had in charge.

Relieved of that fear, he cared very little about her.

"You have dared to stand in my path," said she, still glaring at him, "you imp; little do you know the risk you ran."

"It's not awah dat I runned any risk."

"Your life shall pay for the insult."

"I'd like to know how," was the provoking inquiry, while the African's face was on a broad grin.

"You shall see."

"Rotary, Rotary, here come others; heaven help us."

It was Eva who uttered the startling warning.

Rotary Hastings turned his head and saw two men hastening through the wood toward them.

They were fierce, determined-looking scoundrels, and one of them had a revolver in his hand.

"De gorrynation hebens!" exclaimed the terrified African; "de weather am gettin' too hot heah fur comfort."

And then, to the consternation of Eva Hildreth, the huge escort proved his real cowardice, by turning about and running like a frightened bull from the spot.

Eva was left alone to face the infuriated woman and the two desperadoes Luff, Swank and Hank Wagsnaff.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

ON that summer afternoon, when so many parties at enmity to each other, were moving to and fro, over a comparatively small space, the most extraordinary feature was that, for a time at least, the advantage was on the side of the foes of our hero and heroine.

After Donald Marvin had driven Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff from before him, they rode in the direction of Freehold.

But they went only a short distance.

They knew that their interests demanded they should keep in the vicinity of the house of Mart Calkins, where the two ladies had taken up their quarters.

Had they continued driving toward Freehold, they would not have gone very far before meeting Jake Calkins and Orson Oxx, the latter in the guise of Mr. Tumbrell from Barnegat.

But they turned about, passed the lane leading to the house, and a short distance beyond came upon Cora Hildreth.

Her manner showed that she was waiting for them.

She quickly explained what had taken place.

Eva, her cousin had left.

Unless forcibly prevented, she would reach Philadelphia that evening.

Her appearance there would break up the scheme which Ward Hildreth was putting in shape.

Cora believed he was on the eve of success.

She had formed the idea that if he was left undisturbed only a single day longer, he would succeed.

Her fury, therefore, on learning that Eva had resolved to leave her, may be understood.

To the treacherous Cora it was as terrible as a struggle for life and death.

With the vast wealth which she knew Ward could secure in the shape of personal property, she saw a long, riotous, sinful career before the two; a career in which, after securing a large portion of the funds herself, she would cast off the man whom she abominated, and take up with whomsoever she might fancy.

If Ward failed to obtain the money, the woman saw only a miserable future before her.

It was a future which was worse than death to one of her kind.

She had known Swank and Wagsnaff a long time.

In fact she made their acquaintance when on her former visit to America.

Eva must be prevented from going home at any and all hazards.

The two criminals admitted the force of her statements.

Their anxiety for success was scarcely less than hers.

Ward Hildreth had promised them a princely reward, if they succeeded in keeping the heiress out of sight until he should win in the desperate game he was playing.

Such wages as he agreed to give, would be much more easily earned than by highway robbery, burglary, breaking into a bank, or shoving the queer.

These three conspirators showed more cunning, for the time, than did the three whom they were operating against.

It may have been because the first two were united, while our friends, most of the time, were operating on independent lines.

The natural conclusion reached by Swank and Wagsnaff was that Eva had made all haste toward the nearest railroad station, which as the reader knows, was Farmingdale.

Cora Hildreth suspected the truth.

"Eva knows that such will be our suspicion, and she will therefore defeat us by taking some other course."

What that course was remained to be discovered.

Not one of the three imagined she would turn in the direction of Farmingdale.

Swank gave the woman to understand that the crisis was most grave, because the friends of the lady were searching for her.

Her betrothed was in the neighborhood, and they were convinced that the man whom they dreaded above all others was not far away.

Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron, in all probability, was in Monmouth county at that very moment.

If he should succeed in discovering her before they could come upon her, the scoundrels knew there was but one thing for them to do—that was to withdraw as precipitately as possible.

But they were now maneuvering with the belief that success for a brief time only meant success altogether.

"She has left the main highway," said Cora, "and will not approach Farmingdale before night, or not until she has secured some friend to accompany her."

"Had we not better drive there and find out?" asked Swank, feeling in spite of himself, that this cunning woman was capable of leading them in a scheme of this character.

"It is a considerable while before a train stops at that station; it will be wiser to turn off on one of the byways, and make search before you reach there, for, if she is really at the station, and Donald Marvin finds her, it won't do for us to show ourselves."

"Your head is level there," said Swank, with a grin; "now, if we were in Texas or the West, that sort of business might answer, but it won't do in Jersey."

This plan was carried out.

The scamps whipped up their horse, and turned up the first road which they reached.

It entered from the left.

The path which had been followed by Eva was only a short distance beyond.

When the vindictive Cora reached this avenue leading into the woods, it struck her that it would be very inviting to one in the situation of Eva.

She began a minute examination of the ground.

A brief search resulted in success.

Despite the extreme care shown by the fair fugitive, Cora speedily discovered the imprint of her delicate shoe, pointing toward the woods.

"There is where she has gone," said the exultant woman. "She cannot be far ahead of me."

And she hurried in the direction of the cabin of Rotary Hastings.

At the same time Swank and Wagsnaff were pushing their way along the road in very nearly a parallel direction.

Thus it was they heard the piercing scream of Cora Hildreth, when she was baffled by the huge negro.

They instantly sprung out of their carriage, tied the horse at the side of the highway, and hastened through the wood to the assistance of the woman who was really in no special need of help.

The sight which greeted the desperadoes was a unique one.

It was altogether unexpected, and they hardly knew what to do about it.

They could easily dispose of the negro by frightening him away, but they had no wish to shoot him.

Swank and Wagsnaff were not the men to be placed on trial for such a crime, committed in Monmouth county, New Jersey.

Nor did they wish to lay violent hands on Miss Eva Hildreth, for the consequences of doing so were likely to be disastrous to themselves.

Rotary Hastings simplified the situation somewhat, by turning about and running off, at sight of the reinforcement, backing up the terrible threat of the infuriated Cora Hildreth.

It was with feelings of terror, as we have said, that Eva witnessed this most unexpected turning of the tables.

She was bewildered for a moment, but no thought of flight entered her head.

She was alarmed, as well she might be.

But in addition she was filled with consuming indignation that any one would dare insult her in this manner.

She was proud-spirited, and at times she could scarcely believe that a woman who claimed to be her cousin should call in the assistance of two criminals to place her in forcible restraint.

The certainty that such was the case, and that it was done with a view of preventing her

obtaining that which was her own, drove her almost beside herself.

Holding the dagger with a firm grasp, she looked calmly toward Cora and the two men who were approaching the same point.

Swank and Wagsnaff stopped close beside the fiery pursuer and waited to receive the cue from her.

"What's to be done?" asked Swank in a guarded voice, stepping close to her.

"What's to be done?" repeated Cora, in a voice of infinite contempt. "Do you not know what should be done?"

"I must confess," said the other, "that the matter isn't in the best shape possible."

"If she is allowed to go to her home this evening, then we shall become beggars."

"Hardly as bad as that," said Swank.

"But he will fail, if she is allowed to go on; prevent her for twenty-four hours and each of you shall have a fortune."

"How shall we prevent her? This is a dangerous business, Miss Hildreth."

The look of scorn which she cast upon them was splendid beyond description.

"How prevent her! You have pistols! and you ask me how to prevent her leaving this wood!"

"Oh, no, that will never do," said Wagsnaff; "they generally hang for that sort of sport in Jersey."

"Fools! No one deserves success, who will not take the risk."

"We do not want it, if it is to be won in that way."

"Lend me that pistol; I will teach you how to prevent the wretch from going home, when she is forbidden."

But neither of the desperadoes would permit this Lady Macbeth to have her wish.

"Let us try other means," suggested Wagsnaff, who, like his pal, would have committed the crime without the slightest compunctions of conscience, had he not been restrained by the fear of consequences.

All this time, Eva Hildreth stood like a figure carved in marble, looking at the strange group.

She heard some of the words spoken and could easily judge of the import of the interview.

Wagsnaff now advanced toward her.

"Miss Hildreth, we're sorry for this scene, and are anxious to end it."

"You can do so very speedily."

"How?"

"By removing that woman from my path, and allowing me to go to my home."

"That we can hardly permit: it is necessary that you should remain in this delightful part of the country for a day or so longer."

Eva was angered almost beyond self-restraint.

"I shall not stay here another hour; I shall go to my home; I shall leave this accursed place without delay; if you or she interfere or prevent, you must take the consequences."

Eva made a single step forward, and the face of the desperado assumed a murderous expression.

"Do not attempt it," he said, with a warning shake of his head.

"I shall attempt it."

"Do you not see you are alone and helpless?"

"I am not alone nor helpless!"

For at that moment, Eva Hildreth caught sight of the figure of a man advancing rapidly toward the spot.

It was but a glance, but it told her the thrilling fact that he who was approaching was Donald Marvin, the best beloved of her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ANOTHER EXPECTED ARRIVAL.

THE first intimation Eva Hildreth received that her beloved knew anything of her distress, was his appearance in this secluded spot, in the moment of her extremity.

It was appropriate and withal very romantic that he should come upon the stage of action in this fashion.

At the same time it was embarrassing and complicated the situation all around.

She longed to rush into his arms.

And he longed still more ardently to infold her to his heart and cover her warm cheeks with his kisses of ardent love.

But circumstances forbade.

He raised his hat with all the grace of a courtier, as he strode rapidly to her side.

The light of a sacred affection illumined the features of the enchanting maiden, as she

turned her eyes all tremulous with love upon him and asked:

"Why, Donald, how came you here?"

"I have been hunting for you continuously," he answered, stepping forward and kissing her lips; "I will tell you all about it when we are alone."

Turning, he faced the trio, who were silent for the moment.

"What does this mean?" asked the lover, placing himself in front of his lady-love, as valiant knight should always do.

"It means that you have no business to interfere," replied Wagsnaff, who could not forget the vanquishment received at the hands of this daring youth but a short time before.

Marvin looked steadily at Cora Hildreth, as if he had not seen her in a long while.

"That's a most remarkable woman," said he in explanation to the others. "I do not think I ever saw her like. It was she who jumped off the ferry-boat some time ago, after she and her paramour fixed up a job to make it appear that it was my own Eva who had committed suicide."

Cora heard these blistering words and was literally transfixed with rage.

It was the first time she had ever been addressed in this manner.

But there was more to follow.

"She's a wonderful woman indeed," added Donald, still looking upon her with scornful admiration, so to speak.

"A wonderful woman indeed: she has succeeded in passing herself off as the daughter of that gray-haired old scoundrel, Ward Hildreth. They are fit partners to get up such an infamous scheme as this to rob the child of one of the best men, who has clothed and fed these base ingrates for years."

Suddenly Cora shook as if with the ague.

Turning upon Wagsnaff with a fierceness beyond description she hissed between her closed teeth.

"If you allow him to speak in that way to you and me, you are not fit to live."

"There is no need of becoming excited," said Donald, stepping back and throwing his left arm around the waist of Eva, while he held his cocked revolver in his right, "but the best thing you can do is to back out, and, as they say down in Texas, *'ramose the ranch.'*"

"We ain't in that sort of business," said Wagsnaff, who glared at the youth in a way which showed he was eager to shoot him dead.

"Swank and Wagsnaff," said Marvin. "You may be two of the meanest wretches and cowards in the world, but you ain't fools. You and that woman there, who is a fit associate of such scoundrels as yourselves and the villain in Philadelphia, have played a desperate game, but you have lost."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Swank with an oath; "haven't we got you just where we want you?"

"Not by a large majority. Suppose you should open fire on us; suppose you should kill me and this lady, what would you profit by it? Do you suppose for an instant that such a crime can be committed in any portion of New Jersey, without its being ferreted to the bottom by the authorities? Are you such idiots as to imagine that all three of you would not be found guilty? Do you not know that this State has hung more than one woman for murder? Do you not know she stands ready to do it again? Do you not know that among all the murderesses, there was no more guilty wretch than that one who stands behind you and who is trying to urge you up to the point of attacking us both?"

These were indignant words, but it cannot be said they were very prudent.

Swank and Wagsnaff were such veterans in crime, that they knew the folly of taking a useless risk.

In fact they had about reached the point of considering they had made a failure of the business.

It is not likely they would have assaulted the young lawyer who rushed to the defense of his beloved.

Even the frantic urgings of Cora would have availed nothing, in the face of the cold, hard facts, named by Donald Marvin.

He need not have assured them of the frightful risk they ran by such a course.

No one dreaded the arm of the law more than did they, for the good reason that they had felt its weight several times, and had escaped its vengeance more than once by a hair's breadth, as may be said.

But such characters, as a rule, possess peppery tempers, which are quick to resent insult.

The wounds of Donald produced a different effect than was intended.

Instead of frightening off the desperadoes they tantalized them into ungovernable fury.

They felt they were insulted in a manner which could only be wiped out in blood.

Marvin would have said more, had he not seen the storm he had already roused.

No one knew better than he, that he was at the mercy of these wretches, whose hands were stained with every imaginable crime.

But, as he had declared, he did not believe they would dare carry out their wishes.

Hank Wagsnaff said a few words to his pal, who answered in a voice too low for Marvin to catch.

Cora gesticulated and fiercely urged them to wait no longer.

It was her desire that they should shoot the lovers down.

Womanlike, she believed some story could be concocted which would pass muster in the courts even of New Jersey.

And if it would not, she did not care.

They could get safely beyond the reach of the authorities before the law could lay its hands on them.

Even if they couldn't, she still insisted that the offenders should be shot where they stood.

"It won't do to kill the woman," said Swank, after a brief consultation in an undertone.

"Why not?" asked Cora, impatiently. "She's the very one I want put out of the way."

"But there's no excuse for doing it."

"Why, she's the one that stands between us and the property," insisted the savage Cora, unable to conceal her fury.

"You talk like a fool," said the angered desperado. "That blamed tenderfoot has insulted us, and I'm going to settle with him."

Swank now addressed Marvin:

"You have used some big words, which I s'pose you're ready to back up."

"I'm ready to stand by what I say at all times."

"I'll step out of the path a short distance, so as not to place this lady in danger. Will you do the same?"

"Most assuredly I will."

Before Eva comprehended what all this meant her lover had left her side, and was standing some ten feet away.

Luff Swank had done the same.

Thus the duelists faced each other, and could fire without imperiling the lives of the three spectators.

Before the tragedy could open, however, an old farmer-looking gentleman, with a flapping straw hat and flying linen coat, was descried rushing through the wood toward the spot.

"Thunderation and blastation!" he shouted, "what are you goin' to do? Don't you know you're on my ground, and it's ag'in the law in Monmouth county for two 'tarnal fools to p'int pistols at each other unless they know the darned, infarnal things ain't loaded, which you can't know, for when you think the pesky things ain't loaded, they've got a dozen charges rammed in up to the muzzle. Hold on there, I say, till I read the riot act to you!"

Need we hint the identity of this honest old fellow who was hastening to the spot?

The reader is already well enough acquainted with Orson Oxx not to need an introduction at our hands.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A CURIOUS PARTY.

WHEN Eva Hildreth saw her lover, Donald Marvin, walk resolutely from the path into the wood, with his revolver in hand prepared to engage in mortal combat with the desperado, she almost sunk to the ground in consternation.

Would she permit the noblest and best of men to be shot down by such a degraded criminal as the one who faced him?

Never!

She was on the point of rushing forward, when farmer Tumbrell introduced himself in the vociferous style described.

The racket and hullabaloo created by this singular character naturally centered all attention upon him.

Of the curious party who had met in the pine woods, Donald Marvin was the only one

who knew or suspected the identity of the extraordinary individual.

They, too, had heard the ringing scream which drew Swank and Wagsnaff to the spot.

But they were further off, being on the main highway.

They suspected it had something to do with the singular business on which they were engaged, but could have no knowledge of its real meaning.

The cry, coming from such a distance, sounded faint and further away than it really was.

The direction, however, was clearly indicated, and when it was repeated there could be no mistake.

Orson Oxx directed Donald to make all haste thither, while he promised to follow him.

The Man of Iron drove the horse of Jake Calkins to one side of the road and, tying him to the limb of a tree, started after his young friend, who had made a flying leap from the vehicle, while the first scream of the enraged Cora Hildreth was ringing through the wood.

He was out of sight when Orson hurried in among the trees, but the matchless athlete was on the ground but a few minutes behind him.

He could have overtaken the lover had he chosen to do so.

As it was, he did not arrive a moment too soon.

When he saw Swank and Marvin facing each other, he divined on the instant what it meant.

He would not have them exchange shots for the world.

Luff Swank was an old hand with the pistol, and the chances were he would shoot the young lawyer dead at the first fire.

Even were the result reversed, the consequences would be fatal to the victor.

Dueling, very properly, is regarded as murder in most of the States of the Union.

Determined to prevent the exchange of shots at all hazards, Mr. Tumbrell, as he called himself, broke into an awkward run, uttering the words we have given.

At the same moment, Eva Hildreth rushed forward, and threw her arms about her lover.

"Oh Donald—Donald! what are you about to do?" she demanded, with streaming eyes. "You are imperiling your life for no cause."

"How can I avoid it?"

"There is no need of it; it is an awful crime. You shall not; I will not permit it—you have no love for me, if you seek to murder another person."

It would have been impossible to cast off the excited girl, and Donald did not attempt to do so.

Bending his head, he whispered in her ear:

"There will be no hot fire! That man who's coming is a friend to us both!"

Although Eva could not understand the full meaning of this remark, yet she was quick enough to catch its main import.

No pistol shots were to be exchanged.

That was all sufficient for her.

Then, at his gentle suggestion, she withdrew to the path, standing a short distance from Wagsnaff and Cora, who looked grimly on the singular scene.

The treacherous woman's heart was beating with exultation, for she knew that the desperado must be much more skillful with the deadly weapon than the lover of Eva.

To her mind there could be but one issue to the struggle.

The duel, she was confident, was deferred only a few minutes at the most.

She and the scoundrel at her side could afford to wait a brief while for its termination.

Meanwhile the old farmer seemed to be resolved to break up the hostile meeting.

"Stars and garters!" he called out, rushing forward; "what do you think of yourself?"

Just then he caught his foot in a vine and went headlong to the ground, his straw hat flying off.

He hastily scrambled up, and resumed:

"This is ag'in the law! I'll have you all arrested. What do you mean, sir?"

He was now close at hand, had replaced his hat, and was slowly walking toward the couple.

He addressed his pertinent inquiry to Donald Marvin.

"I don't know as it is any of your business, Mr. Hayseed, if we wish to settle our differences like gentlemen."

"Like gentlemen!" repeated the old man, scornfully; "like a couple of infarnal old fools, you'd better say. Do you know you're trespassing on my ground?"

"I don't know, and I don't care!"

"You don't, eh?" said the farmer, striding up to Donald and catching him fiercely by the arm—"I'll show you!"

And he forced him back several steps.

There the two engaged for several minutes in what seemed a very angry discussion.

Only a few of the words were heard, but they gesticulated angrily, and seemed on the point of coming to blows.

All at once the old gentleman seemed to have become convinced of his error.

The rest who were watching the couple saw Donald Marvin hand him a greenback.

Then they caught its meaning.

The farmer's scruples had been removed in the same manner that a great many scruples are removed in the affairs of this world.

Mr. Tumbrell left Marvin standing where he was and walked some fifty feet further in the woods.

Then he raised his finger and crooked it toward Luff Swank, as a signal for him to approach.

The desperado obeyed, suspecting his object.

"You want to fight a duel, do you?"

"That's our purpose."

"Is that feller over there your friend?" asked the old gentleman, peering around the body of Swank at Wagsnaff.

"Yes, he's my friend."

"That don't look fair to me—two to one."

"Oh, he's a square man. He'll see that everything is done according to Hoyle."

"I'd like to talk with him."

Swank turned his head and signaled to his pal to approach.

The latter did so.

"You two fellers want to fight a duel, I understand?"

Wagsnaff signified that they intended to exchange shots.

"I'm ag'in' duelin'," said Mr. Tumbrell, "for it may get me into trouble, bein' it's on my ground."

"But haven't you given your consent to him over there?"

"Yas," answered the farmer, with a beaming countenance, "but not till he handed me five dollars."

"That's easily arranged then," said Swank, producing the same amount and handing it to the supposed owner of the dueling-ground.

"That's business," said Mr. Tumbrell; "now I'm agreeable. But I want to understand about this—there ain't to be no shenanigagin'."

"Of course not."

"Let me look at your pistol."

With some hesitation Swank handed it to him.

"Have you got one?" asked Mr. Tumbrell, addressing Wagsnaff.

"I always carry one; but I have no use for it now."

"Then let me have it."

"What do you mean?"

"There's only one chap over there with a pistol, and only one of you orter have one till this unpleasantness is settled. Let me hold yours till the shootin' is over."

"I can't consent to that."

"Then I'll inform ag'in' you and have you both hung."

This was an unexpected difficulty, and Swank and Wagsnaff looked at each other, uncertain what they ought to do.

It was clear that the old man was determined.

"He seems to be an honest old fellow," said Swank, "and to save all trouble, let him hold your pistol till we're through."

Wagsnaff cursed considerably and refused, but, after a time, he yielded, and handed over his handsome silver-plated weapon to the supposed farmer.

It will thus be seen that the only two pistols in the company were in the grasp of Mr. Thomas Tumbrell, otherwise Orson Oxx, the Man of Iron.

His whole negotiation and maneuvering were for the purpose of securing those weapons before he made himself known.

He now deliberately pointed both revolvers toward the sky, and discharged every chamber in rapid succession.

"What in the name of fury do you mean?" demanded Swank, striding toward him, with fist clinched.

Hank Wagsnaff, not less exasperated, advanced upon the old man.

The latter flung both weapons over his head, a considerable distance behind him.

"What do I mean? My hearties, I have the pleasure of introducing myself: I'm Orson Oxx, sometimes known as the Man of Iron! My present purpose, if I know my own heart, is to sail in!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ORSON OXX "SAILS IN."

THE astounded desperadoes, who had allowed themselves to be so cleverly disarmed, had scarcely time to comprehend the terrible words uttered by the supposed old farmer, when he carried out his announced intention of "sailing in."

From what the reader has learned of the capacities of Orson Oxx in that direction, it need not be said that he did it most thoroughly.

He first paid his attention to the amazed Luff Swank, who received a blow straight between the eyes, which sent him turning flip-flaps backward for twenty feet.

When he got through falling he lay still, while he tried to settle the question with himself whether his head and the rest of his individual being had parted company.

Wagsnaff, at the very moment he advanced upon the supposed farmer, was seized with a sudden suspicion of his identity.

He would have given all that he had, or ever expected to have, for one grasp of his reloaded revolver.

He had resolved to shoot that Man of Iron who had crossed his path more than once, and whom he held in such mortal dread.

Hank Wagsnaff was a powerful man, quick on the trigger, and capable of handling himself well.

His suspicion, and the fact that his pal was the first to receive the attentions of Orson Oxx, gave Wagsnaff a moment or so in which to throw himself in position.

He was quick to do so.

When the unequalled athlete and boxer faced about and made for the second scoundrel, he saw him with his fists up, his right guarding his body, while the left was advanced ready to shoot in on the first opening presenting itself.

He was poised on his left foot, so that his posture could not have been improved.

This, together with his fine figure, might well have made any ordinary man hesitate before attacking him.

But Orson Oxx was no ordinary man.

He was glad that the villain had thrown himself in shape, for it made the affair more interesting.

It was a most singular sight to witness what apparently was an old farmer, stiff in the joints, suddenly become as limber and athletic as the most trained gymnast, and to see him assume a pugilistic attitude which would have brought cheers from the most critical assemblage that ever gathered on Farnborough Heath, to witness the milling of the leading fighters of the kingdom.

The advantage at such times is always with the defender, who, if he understands the art of self defense, can keep a much better man than himself at his distance.

Orson Oxx feinted several times, and then his left hand plunged in like a cannon-shot.

Hank Wagsnaff was fairly lifted off his feet and sent spinning backward, like a ten-pin, struck on the center.

He would have gone down then his confederate, had he not been with a fine sapling which was at a distance behind him.

As it was, the sapling was very much shaken and as for Mr. Wagsnaff himself, he had more than enough.

He felt instinctively that a second blow, such as he had received, would drive the breath of life from his body.

He turned about and caught hold of the tree to save himself from going to the ground a limp and helpless mass.

Orson Oxx lowered his fists and let his hands hang listlessly, while he looked about, to see whether there was any work left for him to do.

So far as he could note, his work was pretty well finished.

Luff Swank, who was the first to topple over somewhat suddenly had reached the conclusion that he was still in the land of the living, with a bare possibility that he might be permitted to remain a little longer.

"If you don't feel satisfied," observed Oxx, "you can try it over again. I always like to put things in a shape, satisfactory to all parties."

Swank had picked up his hat, and he now glared sideways at his conqueror with a scowling hatred, which was like that of a baffled wild beast.

Orson was hopeful that both would show fight for his blood had become warmed, and he felt the need of a little exercise of that character.

In the hope of persuading Swank to do something of the kind, the Man of Iron moved toward him.

He had no intention of attacking him, unless he should offer resistance, for, however much the ruffian deserved further castigation on general principles, it would have been a cowardly proceeding to attack a vanquished man.

But Luff Swank mistook the meaning of the demonstration.

He would have been willing to stand up and exchange shots with any man, but his terror of that marvelous boxer was uncontrollable.

Without a word, he wheeled on his heel and ran at the top of his speed through the woods, cutting as abject a figure as did Rotary Hastings only a short time before.

There is something contagious in cowardice as there is in bravery.

Orson Oxx turned to look at Hank Wagsnaff but did not make the slightest move toward him.

The sight of his flying companion, however filled the villain with the same wild desire to locate somewhere else.

He too broke into a desperate run, and sped between the trees at a terrific pace, which threatened to dislocate his neck against some of the branching limbs.

Orson Oxx threw back his head and roared.

"That beats anything I ever saw; well, I am in ten dollars besides those two revolvers which are good weapons. Pick them up, Donald, for they're worth carrying away with us."

"By Jewhilkens!" exclaimed a new voice: "if you ain't the most outrageous and unparalleled wonder of the nineteenth century! Give me your hand, Mr. Tumbrell, and you've got to come and stay with me two years! I'll be hanged if you ain't! I'll take you round New Jersey, just on purpose to pick quarrels with all the mean people in the State, and you can knock the stuffing out of 'em. Give me your hand I say."

It was Jake Calkins who introduced himself in this characteristic fashion.

He explained that he became so uneasy over the disappearance of the two young ladies that he started out on foot after them.

When he came across his own vehicle, standing at the side of the road, he didn't know what to make of it; but listening intently, he fancied he heard voices further in the wood and he started toward the point.

He arrived in sight just in time to see Mr. Tumbrell "sail in," and the sight filled him with so much admiration that he could not contain himself.

Rushing forward, he seized the hand of the conqueror, indulging in the observations recorded.

When he looked into the face of the old farmer, he noticed that it wore a more youthful expression than he had seen there before.

There was a marked contrast also in the *tout ensemble*, which awakened a suspicion in the mind of the champion falsifier of that section of New Jersey.

"See here, Mr. Tumbrell; do you belong in Barnegat?"

"I was never there in my life."

"Is your name Tom Tumbrell?"

"No, sir."

"Are you a farmer?"

"I never worked on a farm a day in my life."

"Do you belong to this part of the State?"

"I was never here before."

"Who the blazes are you, anyway?"

"I am the gentleman who was with my friend here when you took us out to Sam Turner's to find these young ladies; the same, in short, whom you declared yours if to be so anxious to meet and chastise. In other words, I am a detective, who, to pay you back for your duplicity, put up the little job on you in Freehold."

Jake Calkins was the picture of amazement.

He stepped back and his eyes bulged from his head during the full minute he stared at the wonderful man.

"By Jewhilakens!" he exclaimed, "it is the same; I can see it now; though I can't understand how you twisted your face up in that shape. Them was false whiskers you had under your chin."

"Of course I had to change my appearance somewhat, but I am the same person."

"Wal, I hain't got any hard feelin's ag'in' you; I'd forgive you," said the magnanimous Jake. "You must go with me to my home and spend the summer with me."

"You will have to excuse me for the present; I promise, however, that if I ever can make it convenient, I will accept your kind invitation."

Calkins was reluctant to give up his immediate claim on the man whom he admired so much, but he was forced to do so.

While this by-play, as it may be called, was going on, Eva Hildreth stood looking on the strange scene.

Once she glanced at Cora and the eyes of the two met.

The gentle Eva took a step forward, prompted to rush into the arms of the miserable woman, whom she could not but pity, despite her wicked nature.

But her better sense came back to her.

She felt that she was too vile for her ever to meet or recognize again.

As for Cora, she would have spurned the beauteous, pure minded girl, had the advance been made.

When Cora found herself deserted, she turned about without a word and walked along the path toward the highway.

When Orson Oxx had finished his brief words with Jake Calkins, he pointed at the retreating figure and said:

"She needs you; go with her."

"I b'l'ieve I will; for my respected sister-in-law told me she hadn't settled her little board bill."

With which philosophical remark he broke into a dog trot after the woman.

Eva was leaning on the breast of her lover, and they were exchanging sweet, tender words.

Orson Oxx waited a few minutes, and then suggested that it would be an opportune time to make haste to Farmingdale, so as to catch the first train homeward bound.

His sensible suggestion was followed.

CHAPTER XL

TWO OLD CONSPIRATORS AGAIN.

THE reader must not lose sight of the fact that all the incidents we have described occurred in the comparatively short space of a few days.

It was on the evening of August 11th that the pretended suicide from the Jersey City ferry-boat took place.

On the next day Ward Hildreth appeared in Philadelphia, and called upon Donald Marvin to offer his sympathy in his great bereavement.

On this same day the arch conspirator held his interview with the sly old lawyer, Gaffney G. Galnaith, who, for a liberal reward, agreed to hasten the proceedings looking for the criminal procurement of the vast personal property left by Caleb Hildreth at his death.

It was on the same day also that Donald Marvin made his visit to New York, with the mournful object of searching for the body of his beloved.

He there met Orson Oxx, the great detective, and accompanied him on the small boat, which was rowed off Communipaw, where the Man of Iron made short work with the river pirates, Tom Tit Tompkins, and the negro, Riseup Bilkens.

On the succeeding day, the detective and Donald Marvin traced the ladies to Monmouth county, New Jersey, where the pursuers were misled during a severe storm by Jake Calkins.

On this day Ward Hildreth visited New York to obtain additional evidence of the death of his niece, and returned to Philadelphia in time to receive and send a dispatch relating to the wicked deception.

On the day following Eva Hildreth accidentally discovered the treachery of the woman whom she had so long believed to be

her cousin, but who, in fact, was no relative at all.

Eva fled from the house to which she had removed, and was followed by Cora, who was determined to prevent her escape, until after Ward Hildreth should have secured possession of the wealth which was the real cause of the conspiracy and the events that followed.

Donald Marvin and Orson arrived on the scene in time to scatter the conspirators, and to rescue Eva from what was an exceedingly unpleasant if not a dangerous situation.

It was on this day also that Ward Hildreth met the lawyer, who was as bad as he in every respect, inasmuch as he stood ready to betray his most sacred trust for gold.

The meeting was by appointment, and the conspirators were in high feather, for both had abundant reason to count upon success.

Galnaith had called upon the Register of Wills in the O'phans' Court, and the interview was a satisfactory one to the foxy scoundrel.

The public official, having admitted the will to probate, informed Galnaith what he already knew, that just so soon as the death of Miss Eva Hildreth was incontrovertibly established, he would issue letters testamentary to Ward Hildreth, the executor.

The careful Register expressed himself as quite convinced that the unfortunate lady was deceased, but he preferred to wait a brief time longer until additional proof could be obtained.

Ward Hildreth was engaged upon that important duty in the metropolis.

In the evening, the two conspirators were seated in the office of the lawyer, the door of which was locked, as it always was, when important matters were under consideration.

"I have secured the affidavits of several other parties who witnessed the melancholy occurrence," said Ward Hildreth, schooling himself to look serious if not sorrowful.

"I presume there is no doubt of the suicide itself, and the main question is to establish the identity of the decedent."

"There is no difficulty about that."

"Seemingly not; the name, as you inform me, appears on the register of the steamer as a matter of course, and there is really no lack of proof."

"You saw the Register to-day?"

"I did and had a satisfactory interview with him."

"He talked right, did he?"

"He always does."

"What did he say?"

"He expressed himself as convinced personally, as I have stated, that poor Miss Hildreth was lost, and her body was not likely ever to be recovered."

"Why then does he hang fire?"

"He seems to think there is an appearance of undue haste in the matter."

"I don't know as that is any of his business," said the old man, firing up; "all he has to do is to do his duty."

"That is all any of us have to do, though we occasionally fail as the world goes."

"What did he say about to-morrow?"

"Nothing positive, but he gave me the impression that when I brought him some slight additional proof, he would not hesitate."

"You have seen the testimony which I secured to-day in New York."

"I have just gone through it."

"Is it sufficient?"

"Undoubtedly it is."

"Will it satisfy the Register?"

"Unquestionably it will."

"You know he's mighty particular."

"He has proven that by hesitating to-day."

"You have known him a long time you told me."

"So I have."

"And ought not to make any mistake about him."

"I never have, and don't think I ever shall."

"What is your candid opinion, then?"

"I have already given it," said Galnaith, with some show of impatience.

"You must understand that this is a very important matter to me and also to you."

The old counselor bowed his head to signify that he appreciated the truth of the statement.

"And you must accept my nervousness as natural under the circumstances. Do you know how much the personal estate of my deceased brother amounts to?"

Gaffney G. Galnaith leaned back in his chair and looked across the table at the evil man who sat opposite.

He read him like a printed book.

He knew there was something crooked about this singular business.

But he did not care, so long as he feathered his own nest.

He was beginning to feel suspicious of him.

Would his client, after securing his wealth, keep the promise he had made to reward him liberally?

This was the question which the fox was asking himself, while looking across the table in the face of the other fox.

He was silent a minute, after the question was uttered and then he said in a low voice:

"I know it to be more than a quarter of a million!"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Ward Hildreth; "I did not suppose it to be near that much."

"Your brother was a very wealthy man."

"He was an infernal sight more lucky than his brother," remarked Ward, with an unseemly laugh.

"Let me see," said Galnaith the lawyer, turning his spectacles full upon the other, "you promised me five thousand dollars for my assistance I believe."

"I did and you shall have it, you may depend on that."

"Would you be willing to advance something on account, say one-half? I am really quite short."

"I would do so with pleasure," was the prompt reply of his client, "but the truth is I haven't one-fifth of that sum to my name. You shall be the first one paid, the moment after the funds come into my possession."

"I would be willing to accept your note."

Ward Hildreth reflected a moment. If he got the quarter of a million, the payment of the note would be a bagatelle for him.

If he didn't receive the inheritance, the obligation would be worth nothing, besides which it could be made contingent on the legacy.

"Draw up the note," he said, asking that the condition intimated should be inserted.

The counselor could not object to that, as he sized up his client very correctly.

Accordingly the note was drawn, signed and retained by Mr. Galnaith.

CHAPTER XLI.

CONCLUSION.

On the succeeding day Ward Hildreth accompanied the foxy lawyer, Gaffney G. Galnaith to the office of the Register of Wills.

The degenerate brother of a most worthy man was in high feather, as he could well afford to be.

He had led a sort of gentlemanly vagabond life from his boyhood, a pensioner on the bounty of a good man, without whose kindness he would have suffered more than once for the actual necessities of life.

Now he saw a golden vista opening before him.

Unlimited wealth, sinful pleasure, and the gratification of all his desires and wishes.

Let him but once grasp the gold and he and the guilty woman, who had stood at his right hand in many wicked plots, would leave the hated country forever.

Under the balmy skies of the Cinnamon Isle, or in some of the secure retreats of the Old World they would find refuge, where nothing should interfere with what he regarded true happiness.

True, to secure this enjoyment, one of the noblest and best of women would have to be robbed.

They would have to mangle the hand that had been always extended in kindness to them.

That, however, was a small matter which caused the hardened wretch no uneasiness of conscience.

"Unless this old scamp clings pretty close to me," thought Hildreth, glancing sideways at the shuffling lawyer, "I'll give him the go by. Five thousand dollars won't be much to one in my position, but I may as well save it."

The affable Register of Wills was found in his office, and he received his callers with his usual urbanity.

When the business was made known to him, and Mr. Hildreth was introduced by the rickety counselor-at-law, he seemed so pleased that the conspirators already felt the funds within their grasp.

"I suppose you have the letters ready," said Mr. Galnaith, in his most oily manner.

"Not quite; they would have been ready for you when you called, but for one thing."

"What was that?" asked Hildreth, trying hard to suppress his excitement.

"I was on the point of signing them when a brief letter came to the office and my chief clerk placed it before me."

Mr. Hildreth felt a lump rising in his throat.

He worked hard to swallow it and said very quietly:

"Ah, from whom?"

"It came from some point in New Jersey."

"May I ask its import?"

"It says there was good reason to believe that Miss Eva Hildreth was not dead."

"What lunatic wrote that?" demanded Mr. Hildreth, with a forced laugh.

The Register did not seem to feel it his duty to answer the direct question, but continued:

"But for the reception of that note your letters would have been ready, for I may say I never saw a case in which the proof of death struck me as more conclusive than this. When a young lady springs off a ferry-boat at night with suicidal intent, and her body isn't found, we must all accept the one conclusion."

"You are quite correct," observed Mr. Hildreth, with another sickly smile.

The counselor-at-law nodded his head and grunted to signify that such were his sentiments.

"Under the circumstances, I have concluded to wait a day or two before passing the letters over to you. I'm sure you will agree with me that an officer holding my responsible position cannot be too careful."

"There is no question as to that," said old Ga'naita, "but I think it equally incumbent on you to pay no heed to the communications of cranks. The country is full of cranks."

"By what authority do you pronounce the writer of this letter a crank?" calmly inquired the Register.

"The letter itself proves it," said Hildreth, "for no one but a crank would presume to write it under such circumstances."

"Probably not, but call in to-morrow."

The Register turned his back upon them and walked away.

The baffled, exasperated and chagrined conspirators had no choice but to go out.

They did so, muttering imprecations of the most sulphurous nature.

"I believe the other side has bought him," exclaimed Ward Hildreth when they reached the street.

"What other side?" was the very pertinent question of the rickety old fox of a lawyer.

"Why—ah—that is—good-day; I'll see you to-morrow."

On his way to the hotel Ward Hildreth took a turn through a certain portion of Broad street.

He did this in order to indulge a weakness which perhaps was not unnatural.

He thus gained the opportunity to pass by and inspect the handsome brown-stone house left by his brother.

As the case stood, he might not secure possession of that, but the fact that the fine structure was a portion of the same estate gave his prospective fortune a certain substantiability which was very gratifying to him.

On this pleasant summer morning, the old conspirator, whose bosom was ruffled by his disappointment of a few minutes before, sauntered along in his usual leisurely and self-sufficient style, and glanced at the front of the building.

The sight which met his gaze froze his blood! At the broad parlor window stood a young man and woman.

They were smiling and laughing and were looking out on the street.

They saw and recognized him.

There could be no doubt of that, because both bowed, seemingly with great respect and deference.

He also recognized them.

They were Donald Marvin and Eva Hildreth.

There was no room for the shadow of a doubt on that point.

Ward Hildreth was too dumfounded to return the salutation.

His head swam and he staggered like a drunken man.

But he managed to get by the house and rallied somewhat, as he neared his hotel.

There he swallowed a glass of raw brandy and tried to brace up.

Walking to the counter, he was banded a telegram, which had arrived but a short while before.

Thus it ran:

"Everything has fallen through your fault. Eva left her place last night and must have reached Philadelphia the same evening. That ends the business. You ought to have secured everything yesterday, but instead of that I learn you spent most of the day in this city. It serves you right. You needn't expect to see me again. Mr. Swank and myself have started on an extended wedding tour. Co. A."

"There's one good feature about this infernal business," muttered the old scamp, glaring at the telegram in his hand: "Swank and Wagsnaff didn't play their hand right. They're to blame for allowing Eva to get away."

"Therefore I smile because I have my revenge."

"Swank has gone off with Cora."

"I ask nothing more. I am fully revenged."

"Now if he will turn her over to Wagsnaff after awhile I shall feel that this disaster is not without its compensation."

"The general average will come out right."

And he imbibed another snifter of raw brandy, that is "smiled" again.

After which he paid his bill and took the afternoon train for New York.

Some weeks later he sailed for England, where he died within a year from excesses.

During his last sickness, when he knew that his end was approaching, he dictated a repentant letter to Eva, who, at that time had been married several months.

"I see now as never before," said he, "the sinfulness of my life. The wrong I attempted to do you was of the most dreadful character. If you can forgive me, now that I must soon meet the Judge of all, it will help to smooth my dying pillow."

Tears filled the beautiful eyes of the young wife, as she read the letter to her husband.

"Yes," said Donald, "send him your forgiveness for the miserable wretch can excite enmity no longer."

"I will write the letter at once. Wait, for I want you to do something for me."

"I suppose if that adventuress Cora should write and ask you to look over several matters, you would do so?"

"If she were truly repentant, of course I would."

"Well, all I can say is, it is just like you."

"When I am so happy in the possession of the best husband in the world, why should not I strive to make others happy?"

He kissed the upturned face and then lit his cigar, while the good woman wrote a tender, forgiving letter to the man who had sought to do her such a great wrong.

As might have been expected, the same missive contained a liberal remittance, which her happy husband put in proper form for transmission to England.

There is good reason to believe that its timely arrival did much to add to the comfort of the poor wretch, as he neared the end of his mortal race.

As for Luff Swank and Hank Wagsnaff, they were two hardened criminals who were not likely to stop in their evil career until checked by the hand of death.

They were the sort of men to die with their boots on.

As for Orson Oxx, the man of Iron, he who had done such valuable service on the right side during the elucidation of "The River Mystery," all we have to say is, that it is more than likely our readers will soon hear from him again.

THE END.

THE

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